

THE PET OF PEACH GULCH.

BY M. QUAD OF THE MICHIGAN PRESS.

PART I.

A HUNDRED silver-miners had dropped spade, bar and pick, and were crowded around a prairie-hunter who sat his pony in the centre of the camp, and held up to view a handsome little boy about three years old.

Had one of the unkempt grimy men discovered a silver *cache*, worth a cool \$20,000, Peach Gulch could not have been more excited than when the hunter rode into camp and held the boy up to view.

"Ar' it really a live che-ild?" yelled one.

"It surely ar'!" shouted another.

"Whar did ye git him?"

"Whose che-ild is it?"

"What ye goin' to do with him?"

The hunter handed the boy down to the hands held up, dismounted, and then, while he munched his salt pork and Johnny cake, he explained:

Fifty miles away, on the broad prairie, he had come upon the child, wandering over the grass alone, not a wagon trail nearer than thirty miles, and no sign of human life about. The boy was hollow-eyed and worn-out, showing that he had travelled a considerable distance, and suffered for want of food and water.

"I thought it war' a wolf when I first seed his little white head above the grass," explained the hunter; "an' it war' just luck an' chance that I bore down that way. He war' wild at first, and when I gin him some pervisions he devoured 'em like he hadn't tasted food for a week."

"Then it's a real che-ild, is it?" asked a big miner, peering into the boy's face.

"I reckon 'taint nothing else," replied the hunter. "See that blood on his dress? Wall, that tells the hull story! 'Twas some immigrant family which got off the trail, an' the cussed reds bore down on 'em with tomahawk and knife. It war' in the night, perhaps, and this ere cub was overlooked some way and wandered off. Why the wolves didn't make a meal of him, is more than I know."

"It war' the Lord!" replied a miner, in a solemn voice.

"Like enough—like enough," said the hunter; "in course the Lord kin do most anything."

The boy had been well fed, having been with the hunter two days, and he had lost something of his wild look; but, nevertheless, he felt afraid of the great rough men crowding around him, and he shrank closer to the hunter.

"An' kin he talk?" asked one of the men, in a doubting voice.

"Talk!" echoed the hunter, indignantly, "in course he can. He ar' afraid jist now, 'cause ye look like a parcel o' grizzles, though yer hearts is big an' kind. He can't tell how it happened, but he says his name is Paul, an' he keeps axin' me when I'm goin' to take him hum, and why his mother don't come. I haint much of a talker, an' I haint said much; but when he gits over his scare, I'll bet he'll speak right out."

The men crowded a little closer, and kept their eyes on the child, as if he were a rare curiosity. And indeed he was. Way back in the east, thousands of miles nearer sunrise, some of the men had left wives and children; but the years had gone by as they delved in the gulch, and they had almost forgotten how a child should look. Five hundred men had worked in Peach Gulch at odd times, and a hundred were there yet; but it was not on record that a woman or child had ever been seen within a hundred miles of the spot.

"An' what ar' ye goin' to do with him?" finally asked a miner.

"That's plump and square, that ar'," answered the hunter; "an' now we come to business. Ye see I can't take care o' him, for I'm hoopin' around like an Injun. It haint likely as he'll ever be called for, 'cause his folks are chopped up, an' no one knows whar' he cum from. He's an orphan, an' somebody's got to 'dopt him, ez they call it. I hev rode about fifty miles outen my way, an' I s'pose ye'll throw in somethin' for my trouble, an' take the cub off my hands."

"Whoop-hooray! Hand out yer metals!" cried several men; and in less than two minutes the hunter had exchanged his prize for a goodly amount of silver.

"I know ye'll take good care o' him," he said, as he looked around on the crowd, "but ye must be sort o' gentle on the start. Ye see, he don't know ye, an' he's kinder scart at sight o' yer long ha'r an' dirty faces."

One after another of the men held out their hands, and sought to make friends with the boy, but he would not leave the hunter.

"Here, ye man over thar', come here!" called the hunter to one of the miners whose face was clean, and wearing a kind smile. He came over, and the hunter said to the child:

"Now, bub, here's yer kind uncle, an' he's going to take the best kind o' care of ye. Ye see, I hev got to go hum, an' I can't take ye along, an' ye'll hev to stop here."

He lifted the child up, and the fatherly smile on the miner's face won the boy's heart. He allowed himself to be transferred, amidst a great cheering, and then the hunter was ready to go. Turning to the boy, he said:

"Wall, bub, here's my gripper, and I hope ye'll git along all right. I shell drop around this way once in a while, an' ye mustn't forget who found ye out thar' on the perary, an' took car' of ye."

The boy called after the hunter, and began to cry; but after a moment he snuggled up to Dave as if having confidence in him.

"Now, stop this yellin' an' git outen the way!" demanded Dave, as the crowd cheered and pressed closer. "This che-ild ar' scart, he ar', an' we must gin him time to get used to us. He's ours, an' he's going to stay an' be the pet of Peach Gulch, an' after a bit he'll let his tongue wag."

Dave took the child to his shanty, promising to put him on exhibition after supper, and the crowd dispersed, some to pick up their tools and work again, and others to assemble in threes and fours, and canvass the strange freak of fortune which had brought Peach Gulch a pet.

Dave petted and soothed the child, fixed him up something extra to eat, and in a couple of hours little Paul was quite at home, asking a good many questions, and answering a few. Dave sought to find out

how fate had left the boy alone on the prairie, but he could not secure even a hint. The balance of the family, and perhaps a whole party, had undoubtedly been butchered by Indians, and terror and exposure had overpowered the child's memory, even if he realized what had occurred.

"Ye ar' an orphan, straighter'n o a string," said Dave, as he watched the child; "but ye hev found friends, an' ye'll hev the best Peach Gulch affords, or thar'll be a fight!"

"I aint home, am I?" inquired the boy, looking anxiously at the miner.

"Yes, my che-ild, ye is," replied Dave, patting the white head; "an' I'm going to be a father to ye. Somewhar' I've hearn tell or read sumthin' about 'I was a stranger, an' they took me in.' I don't exactly remember just how it came in, but it fits yer case to a dot. Have some more beans an' meat, my che-ild?"

After the labors of the day had ended, and the men had finished supper, there was a general call for the pet; and Dave exhibited the boy to the crowd, which was scarcely less demonstrative than at noon.

"Be kinder human with him," chided Dave, as they whooped and shouted. "Ye see, he hev met with a great affliction in the loss of his parients, an' then he's way off here among strangers, an' he feels put out like."

"Did he eat anything?" called out a miner.

"Eat! Wall, now, you orter seen him gittin' away with beans!" replied Dave.

When Paul found that their zeal proceeded from kindness, he allowed them to pass him around, and he answered a number of questions, much to the delight of the crowd. When he was finally taken away the men sat down to discuss his future. His clothing was sadly out of repair, and a dozen miners offered their softest and best garments to be cut over for his use; one of them could make the boy a cap; another would try his hand upon a pair of shoes; another would make something else, and every man was anxious to do something to better the pet's condition.

"I tell ye, boys," said a grizzly old miner, "it ar' awful to think of anybody's being a orphan, without anybody to love him an' call him purty names! Peach Gulch has got to stand by this che-ild while there's a crust in camp!"

"Hooray for the Pet—hooray!" yelled the men, tossing up their hats.

Dave was the best man in camp to have the care of little Paul, although he was an old bachelor, and never had any experience with children. He kept himself the cleanest, had the most orderly shanty, and he would give the boy better care than any one else could. He therefore had the full permission of Peach Gulch to act as a sort of adopted father and guardian to the boy; but it was with the understanding that every man should still have an interest in, and consider himself a protector and champion for the child.

There was more cheering, handshaking and singing in Peach Gulch that night than had ever been known before, although Fourth of July had been duly celebrated twice, and everybody had caroused and tried to feel happy.

"Durned if I don't feel womanish!" said one of the roughest of the silver diggers, as somebody brought the news that the boy had gone to sleep for the night; and his partner, who had been "offish" for a few days, reached out his hand, and said:

"Come, Bill, gin us yer hand. We was both to blame, an' both fools. I've been thinkin' 'bout my own childers back in York State, an' my heart is as tender as a girl's!"

Next morning there were many anxious inquiries around camp to know how the pet had passed the night; and Dave received all delegates with a smile, and explained:

"Slept like a rabbit! I jist lay down an' took him on my arm, an' the fust thing I knew it was daylight, an' he was pullin' my ha'r. I didn't remember at fust who he was, an' I thought an angel had dropped through the roof!"

There were half a dozen men who didn't go to work that day. One got a soft bootleg, to make a pair of shoes; another ripped up and made over a shirt; and before night little Paul had a new outfit throughout. A woman would have laughed to see him thus "fixed up;" but, as Dave remarked, each man had done "his level best, and they didn't go a cent on fashion." Paul was brought out at night to be admired, and when the miners saw that he was becoming used to his situation, and learned from Dave that he took his meals regularly,

and appeared in the best of health, they threw up their hats, and cried:

"Hooray for our che-ild!"

One might have thought that it would get to be an old story after a few weeks, but such was not the case. After a few days the boy's vivacity returned; he grew stout, and he wandered around the camp, and allowed anybody to stroke his white hair and take him up. If any of them shot a rabbit, a good portion was carried to Dave's cabin, to be cooked for the pet; and if the boy had an ache or a pain, the whole gulch was ready to knock off work until he was well again.

There were few changes in the camp. Some men were making a fair thing of it, and were staying to accumulate their "pile;" and others, not doing so well, might have sought other fields but that the presence of the boy made them hesitate about going.

No father could have been kinder to a child than Dave was to the little stranger; and the love was reciprocated. While willing to tarry for a few minutes in other shanties, the lad was not at home unless in Dave's; and though permitting the men to take him up and carry him around, he had full confidence only in Dave.

By-and-by the over-indulgence bore fruit. The pet grew independent, and wanted his way about everything; and Dave saw with sorrow and anxiety that something must be done. One afternoon, when the boy was asleep on his blanket, a council was called, and the subject of enforcing family discipline was broached. Some thought the boy would come out all right in the end, and some thought that, for his future good, he must have a curbing hand; and Dave said:

"Partners, ye know we hez all got tender hearts for the che-ild, but we all know that if a che-ild ar' allowed to come up as he will, he'll be fourteen ounces of bad to the pound."

"Yes, that ar' so," mused the council.

"I wont hurt him any—in course I wont; but I'll gin him to know that he must mind, an' then he'll come to it after a few kicks," continued Dave.

It was settled that the Pet of Peach Gulch should be coerced, at the rod's end, if need be, and a great burden was lifted from off Dave's shoulders.

It was not long ere he was called upon

for a test. The pet was requested not to throw stones into the pot of bean soup over the fire. He persisted, and when Dave remonstrated and ordered, Paul became indignant, and deliberately upset the kettle.

"It'll most kill me, bût I hev a solemn duty to perform!" said Dave, as he cut a small switch.

He laid the switch over the boy's back, pretending to strike very hard, but taking care not to hurt, and the pet broke down, and promised obedience in the future.

"My che-ild," said Dave, to the sobbing boy, "do ye know that I hev got yer bringin' up, an' that if ye turn out bad they'll say that Dave didn't do his dooty as a father should? Many an' many's the night I've laid awake, with ye sleepin' on my arm, an' thought an' planned for ye; an' what I asks of ye is to be good an' mindful."

The child had to have one or two more lessons, but after a little time he consented to sink his independence, and promptly render obedience whenever it was asked of him. He grew taller and stouter as the weeks and months went by, and when spring came he was the pride as well as the pet of Peach Gulch.

PART II.

It was seldom that Dave left camp for an hour, solely on account of the pet, but one afternoon, when Paul was fast asleep, and likely to remain so for two or three hours, the miner took a stroll up the gulch, saying to the men that he would be back in a little while, and that no one must disturb the sleeping child.

The hours passed, and Dave did not return. The pet woke up and cried for him, and the men wondered at his continued absence; and finally the camp was alarmed.

"I want Dave—I want Dave!" Paul kept crying, and the men could soothe him only for a moment at a time. They pounded on kettles with clubs, let him smash their bottles and overhaul their pockets, but he would soon recollect that Dave was absent, and cry out for him.

When darkness came without bringing the miner, the men made up a searching party. They found him about three miles up the gulch, after he had made up his mind that he must die alone. He was terribly used up. He had come upon a griz-

zly, and though making a brave fight, he had been overpowered, and so wounded that he could not rise. The left arm was broken, the right badly lacerated, and the claws of the infuriated bear had sunk into his back and legs.

The men heard his faint call, but they would not have known him except for his clothing and voice. A blow from the terrible paw had broken his nose, and otherwise disfigured his face, and they could see at a glance that he would have a hideous look if he got well.

"Ye didn't bring the pet along, did ye?" was his first inquiry.

The men replied in the negative, and he continued:

"I wish ye had. I don't believe I'll last to be carried back to camp, and I can't die without feelin' the boy's arms around my neck!"

They washed off the blood, made a rude litter, and at midnight they had him back to camp, though he was in a dead faint, and there was no hope that he would live to see the sun come up.

The pet was awake, and watching for him. They had tried to soothe the boy to sleep by telling him stories, and carrying him around, but he could not rest until Dave's return.

The unconscious mangled body was carried to the shanty and tenderly laid down. They didn't mean to let the pet know of the calamity for a time, but he made his escape from the men, and crept in and looked upon the victim.

"That aint Dave!" he screamed, starting back in horror at sight of the bloody face.

Strangely enough, the sound of his voice overpowered pain and everything else, and Dave recovered consciousness, and opened his eyes.

"Hev you got home—didn't I hear the pet?" he asked.

They brought the boy forward, and as Dave saw him, he made a move to raise his broken arm, and whispered:

"Let the che-ild come and kiss me!"

"You aint Dave! you aint Dave!" Paul screamed, shrinking back; and nothing could induce him to go nearer the wounded man. An hour after midnight he sobbed himself to sleep, and Peach Gulch had more sorrow than it had ever known before.

All of the miners were rude surgeons,

and they made the injured man as comfortable as circumstances would permit, though they dared not hope he would live beyond a few hours.

There was no work in the gulch next day. Everybody liked Dave. He was a sort of father to them all, always maintaining an even temper, and having superior judgment. When morning came he rallied, instead of sinking. They wondered at it, for he was not remarkably strong, but behind his constitution was a will as strong as ever given to man.

"I hev got to live for the che-ild," he said to the sad-faced miners; and he was going to make will conquer death, even though he stood in the shadow of the sombre mantle.

The miners hoped that the face would look better by the light of day, but it did not. The nose was mashed and broken, one of the eyes had nearly been torn out, and there were wounds on the cheeks which would leave deep scars. They did not dare tell him how badly he was hurt, and they were thankful that he made no inquiries.

Little Paul was made to understand that Dave had fallen upon the rocks, and was seriously injured, and then they took him into the shanty, fearing that he might express terror and aversion, and thereby wound the noble heart, and yet hoping he would not.

Dave had been sleeping lightly. As he heard the boy's voice he unclosed his eyes, and asked:

"Hev ye brought pet fur me to see?"

The men brought the boy forward. The patches on the miner's face did not look as hideous as the blood, and Paul was not as frightened as before.

"Be you Dave?" he asked, as he leaned over the miner.

"Yes, my che-ild, I ar'—kiss me once!" replied Dave.

The boy did it, though unwillingly, and then he shrank away again.

"He's kinder scart like," explained one of the men, "but I reckon he loves ye jist the same!"

"I hope so—I hope so!" replied Dave; and there were tears in his eyes.

Paul was very quiet for the next week. They made him understand that Dave was very sick, but might get well, and that it was necessary for some one else to take

charge of him. "Uncle Sile" was the man chosen. He was a widower, with three or four children somewhere in the East, and was next best to Dave in all that would be needed in a guardian. He took the pet to his shanty, and in a little time the boy clung to him as he had to Dave.

There were days when Dave was wild with pain, and could have no one but the nurse around the shanty; and again there were times when he was cheerful, and wanted the pet to sit by him. After a time the bones of the arm began to knit, and the wounds to heal, and it was settled that the miner would live. Then he wanted the pet restored to the shanty.

"Seems as if I'd get well faster if the boy was here," he pleaded; and the two men who had taken turns at nursing him, felt that a critical hour had arrived.

They were not keen, sharp men in the study of human nature, but they had seen from the first that the pet was to go back on Dave. It was hard for the boy to believe that the crushed and wounded man, with his face so terribly destroyed, and his voice so altered, was Dave. He felt afraid of him from the start, and the longer he remained with Uncle Sile, the more he dreaded to go in and face Dave.

"It'll nigh kill poor Dave when he finds that the boy don't love him any more!" whispered one of the men, as they consulted together at the rear of the cabin.

"It's goin' to be awful tough, but Dave hez a brave heart, an' p'raps he'll bear up," replied the other.

It was agreed that they should put the hour off as long as possible, by urging Dave to wait until he got a little stronger; and he consented to wait a week. He would then be well enough to crawl out into the sun, and perhaps when the boys saw him off his sick bed his aversion would not be so strong.

Uncle Sile's big heart was full of love for the lad who slept every night on his arm, and who always addressed him as "grandpa," but he felt that Dave had a better right, and he agreed with the nurses that pet must go back. They reasoned with the boy, coaxed and promised, but they found him as firm as a rock.

"Taint Dave—Dave's gone way off!" he sobbed, and he shuddered as he remembered that terrible-looking face.

"P'raps it'll all come right arter a few

days," said Uncle Sile, tears in his eyes; and they concluded to wait.

Dave picked up rapidly, and at the end of another week he was able to walk around the gulch. The men had been very kind to him, and they rejoiced to see him out, though it would be weeks yet before he could use his arm. It had become generally known that the pet had alienated himself from his best friend, and though the men felt sorry, they could not wonder at it. The sight of the left eye was destroyed, one corner of the mouth was torn out, the nose broken and the cheeks scarred; and there was not the least resemblance to Dave of old.

The wounded man sent word around that he wanted to borrow a hand-glass, that he might see how badly his face was hurt; and here the miners displayed genuine charity. Glasses were always few, and at this time not a single one was to be found in the gulch. Owners hid them away and told lies, rather than that Dave should see his horrible scars.

Uncle Sile moved to the upper end of the gulch, to postpone a meeting between Dave and the pet as long as possible, hoping that every day would make a change in the boy's feelings. There was always some excuse for not bringing the boy down, and the dreaded meeting did not take place until nearly two weeks after the miner first crawled out.

Then he would be put off no longer. Leaning on his crutch, he hobbled up to Uncle Sile's shanty. He looked much paler than usual, and his lips were hard shut, like one who had made a stern resolve. Before going he slipped something into his bosom, whispering to himself:

"If the pet goes back on me I might as well die."

The word went through the gulch that Dave had gone up to see the pet, and the men at once knocked off work, feeling that something would happen. The boy was sailing chips in a kettle of spring water, and Uncle Sile was picking over beans for dinner. He grew pale and his voice trembled as he welcomed Dave, and he prayed in his heart that pet's love for the wounded man might suddenly return.

"My che-ild, don't ye know me?" asked Dave, as the boy looked up and shrank away a little.

"You aint Dave—you is ugly man!" replied Paul.

"Come, my che-ild, come here," coaxed Dave.

Paul sidled up to Uncle Sile and clasped the old man's arm for protection.

"Go and see Dave, my son!" coaxed Sile.

"No—no—'tain't Dave!" cried the lad, beginning to tremble.

"Yes it ar', my che-ild," said Dave. "I'm the same as took care o' ye, an' was like yer father for months an' months. Come an' sit on my knee and kiss me like yer used to."

"No—no—no!" almost screamed the lad, showing that he was badly frightened.

Uncle Sile would have carried him over to Dave, but his cries and screams alarmed the whole camp.

There was a long time in which Dave sat with his head turned away, and his limbs shook as if he had a chill. Finally he turned to Uncle Sile, and said:

"I allers liked ye, Uncle Sile. Thar' was never anything between us, an' I know ye'll answer me fair an' square when I axes ye a qeshun."

"Go on," said Uncle Sile, in a husky voice.

"Don't—don't ye think the pet has gone back on me?" asked Dave, shaking all over.

"Dave Warren, ye hev axed me a plain question," said the old man, "and afore God I'll answer ye as I think! Ye see, ye ar' awfully clawed an' bitten, an' the boy don't remember ye. I'd gin all the silver ever taken out of this gulch if he'd go back ter live with ye, but—but I'm afraid he—he never will."

He was afraid of a scene, but there was none. The wounded man seemed to make a giant effort to be cool, and he was cool. Only, there was a wonderful change in his voice as he said:

"I don't blame ye, pardner, an' I don't blame the pet. I got it bad, and I spects I look fearful ugly. He ar' only a 'fraid che-ild, an' I might hev known he'd be scart o' me."

"I hope he'll git over it arter a while," said Uncle Sile, relieved to find Dave so cool.

"I'd gin a thousand dollars to kiss him once more, but I don't want to scare him," said Dave. "I hope he'll come up a good boy. Thar's a pile o' silver under the big stone in my shanty. Jim an' Dan

must hev part of it, fur they took good care of me, but the rest ar' for the boy."

"Why—you—why—" said Uncle Sile, in alarm.

"Be good to the pet," interrupted Dave, waving his hand; "an' when he gits older tell him all about me. Here's my hand, Uncle Sile, an' remember I don't bear ye any ill-will whatsumever."

He pulled his hand away from the old man, thrust it into his bosom, and next moment he was dead on the floor, and the cabin was full of smoke from his discharged revolver.

Uncle Sile leaped up and raised the dying man's head, at the same time calling for aid; but he died before any one came in—died without another word.

It was a sad crowd which stood in and around the cabin to listen to the old man's explanations.

"He war' too tender-hearted," whispered one.

"He didn't care to live when the pet went back on him," whispered another.

"Pardners, I'd sooner had my right arm cut off than to see this!" sobbed Uncle Sile.

The pet crept up and looked at the bloody face, and then he skulked away

and hid behind the bed, as if fearing that they would hold him guilty of murder.

It was a great shock to the gulch. Some of the men cried like children, and they were as tender as women when they dressed the corpse for the grave and carried it down to the shanty. There was no man of God in those wild regions, but when they stood around the open grave at sunset, each man with bowed head, Uncle Sile said:

"He wasn't a Christian man, but his heart was right an' good, an' I believe the Lord will forgive him."

And thus they buried the body. Stones were heaped up that the place might ever be known, and on a plain board the knife of a miner cut the epitaph:

*
* DAVE WARREN. *
* HE DIED *
* FOR HIS LUV OF *
* THE *
* PET OF PEACH GULCH. *
*

THE PLAGUE SHIP.

BY JAMES D. MCABE, JR.

IN the year of our Lord 18—, before steam had driven the old packet ships from the seas, the city of Philadelphia was the port to which the best and most popular vessels belonged. There was one line, especially, that held its place in the public favor long after the steamers commenced to make such havoc in the old state of affairs. The largest and fleetest of the vessels of this line was the "Sovereign of the Seas," and sure am I that a finer ship never spread her canvas to the breeze. Everything was fitted up on a scale of the utmost magnificence, and nothing was left undone that could in the least contribute to the comfort of the passengers.

The captain, Brydges by name, was an old sailor. He had been born at sea, and had passed all but twelve years of his life on salt water. He loved the noble ship which he commanded, better than he did himself, and her loss was the hardest blow that ever fell upon him. How this came about, it is the purpose of these pages to relate.

The year 18— is memorable for the fury with which that dreadful scourge, the cholera, swept through the busy populated cities of Europe and America. There are many still living, who remember with what terror people watched the progress of the pestilence through the land, and how they suffered almost death from their fears. It was a season of darkness and anguish, such as America had never known before. God grant the fearful drama may not be repeated!

It was on a bright July morning, in this terrible year, that "The Sovereign of the Seas" sailed out of the Mersey for Philadelphia. She had thirty passengers in the cabin, and three hundred in the steerage. All were cheerful and happy, and no one dreamed of the troubles that were to beset their voyage. They were leaving a land in which the pestilence was just beginning to appear, and seeking a new world, which as yet the scourge had left untouched. The fine weather and the balmy breezes gave them great cause for hope, and it would

have been strange had any one experienced a fear for the future.

Among the cabin passengers, was a young officer of the American navy, Lieutenant Walter Fairfax. He had been stationed in the Mediterranean, but his health had failed there, and he was now going back to the States to recover it. He was a fine handsome fellow, and withal a genuine seaman. The captain, who was also an American, took a fancy to him from the first, and his friendship seemed to be fully returned by the lieutenant. He kept the captain company in his watch, and frequently relieved him of his duties.

"The Sovereign of the Seas" had now been at sea six days. The weather had been all that could be desired, and the swift-sailing craft had made excellent time. The log showed that she was fully up to her usual speed, and the captain declared there was no doubt that they would reach Philadelphia quicker this time, than on any previous voyage which the ship had made.

On the seventh day the weather grew cooler, and a misty disagreeable rain began to fall about twilight, which continued all night, and the next day. On the eighth night, a heavy fog settled down over the ocean, completely shutting out everything. It was impossible to see across the deck, and the mist was close and stifling. Very naturally, such unpleasant weather threw a gloom over the passengers. This time it even affected the crew, used as they were to such occurrences. The mate said to the captain that he felt as if something dreadful was about to happen, and could not shake off the foreboding. The skipper laughed at the idea, but somehow the laugh had not its usual hearty ring. The fog was not only unpleasant, it was dangerous. The ship was right in the track of vessels to and from Europe and America, and it was not improbable that in the impenetrable gloom a collision might occur. This made the captain anxious and uneasy, and kept him on deck long after his watch was ended. Lieutenant Fairfax, whose experi-

ence made him fully alive to the danger, bore him company.

The two were standing by the cabin door, and had relapsed into silence. Suddenly the young man raised his head, and peered anxiously into the mist.

"What is the matter?" asked Captain Brydges.

"I am confident," replied the lieutenant, "there is a large vessel near us. You are an old sailor, captain, and you must have felt that inexplicable mysterious consciousness which often assures men of our profession of the presence of a ship, even when we cannot see it. I—"

He was interrupted by a sound like the creaking of cordage.

"Keep her away," cried the captain to the man at the wheel. "Down with your helm. Hard! hard! There's a vessel off the port bow."

"Ship ahoy!" came rattling across the water through the fog, the voice having that hoarse brazen sound which a trumpet imparts to it. "What ship is that?"

"'The Sovereign of the Seas,' eight days out from Liverpool; bound for Philadelphia," hailed the captain, promptly, in reply. "What ship is that?"

"Tell them in America to watch for me. I am on my way," said the strange voice, in a tone that made the skipper shudder, in spite of himself.

"What ship is that?" Captain Brydges thundered, vexed that his question had not been answered.

"You will know soon enough. Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter seemed to ring through the ship with an infernal echo. The captain shook off the feeling of dread which had crept over him at first. At that time the high seas were not entirely free from the presence of rovers, and he thought he had now encountered one of these crafts. He turned to Lieutenant Fairfax, and said:

"I think I had better assemble the crew. That rascal may attempt foul play with us, and—"

He paused abruptly. The light from the cabin was shining full in the face of his companion, who had sank back against the wood-work for support. The young man's face was as livid as that of a corpse, and he was trembling as with an ague.

"Great heavens, man!" exclaimed Captain Brydges. "What is the matter? You must be ill."

"I am not well," replied the lieutenant, feebly. "I have had a sudden and terrible shock. Let the crew alone, captain. You will not be troubled by this stranger again. I know what I say, and to-morrow I will explain it to you. To-night I cannot."

With these words, the young man passed into the cabin, and hurried into his stateroom, leaving the commander of the ship overwhelmed with astonishment, and not a little alarmed. The captain passed a sleepless night, and paced the deck restlessly until broad day.

By the morning the fog had cleared away, and the weather had grown as warm as when the voyage began. All hands, passengers and crew, were delighted with the change.

At breakfast, the seat of Lieutenant Fairfax was vacant, and upon sending to his stateroom to know the cause, answer was returned that he was very sick. Towards midday, Captain Brydges received a message from him to come to him at once. Upon entering the stateroom, the skipper found the ship's surgeon sitting by the berth, looking very grave and sad. He was astonished and shocked at the change in the young lieutenant's face. He seemed a complete wreck of what he had been the day before.

"I had no idea you were so sick," said the skipper, "or I would have been here before."

"I am a doomed man, captain," said the lieutenant, faintly. "I am almost gone."

"O no; not so bad as that!" commenced the captain; but the sick man interrupted him.

"Captain Brydges," he said, in a low startling voice, "I shall be a dead man by sunset. *I have the Asiatic cholera in its worst form.*"

The skipper started back in affright.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"It is true," said Lieutenant Fairfax, speaking with great difficulty. "I had no cause to fear it when I came on board. God grant that mine may be the only case. As soon as I am dead, captain, sew me up in a blanket, and drop me overboard at once." He paused a moment, as if to gather strength, for he was very much exhausted, and then went on. "I promised last night to explain my strange words about the vessel we spoke. Who the person was that hailed you, or what is the

character of the vessel he commands, I do not know. I only know that your being spoken by him bodes you no good. Two years ago, the frigate to which I was attached was spoken in a similar manner in the Straits of Gibraltar, and during the next week we lost one hundred of our men from cholera. I fear this is an evil omen, and that I am but the first of a long list of victims."

He sank back exhausted, and the captain turned to the surgeon in a state of bewilderment, and asked if the lieutenant was not wandering in his mind; but the surgeon answered that the mind of his patient was perfectly clear, and that there was no doubt that he would die before sunset. It was the most rapid case of cholera he had ever known. He advised his commander to keep the circumstance secret. No other case might occur, and the knowledge of this one would be sure to produce a panic among the passengers and crew, that might lead to serious results.

Lieutenant Fairfax died that afternoon. The surgeon told the passengers he had died of heart-disease, and accounted for his sudden burial by stating that he had requested it. With these explanations, the passengers were compelled to content themselves, but they were far from being satisfied. The studied reticence of the captain and surgeon, the only persons yet in the secret, convinced them that there was something connected with the death which the officers of the ship were anxious to conceal; and besides this, they had heard from the sailors the story of the mysterious ship that had hailed them on the previous night. These things made them dissatisfied, and before the next morning, the tenth day out, effectually put an end to the careless enjoyment they had hitherto experienced.

The next morning the surgeon sought the captain with an anxious troubled face.

There are two cases of cholera in the steerage," he said. "I have had them removed to the hospital. I am afraid they are very bad cases, sir, and that the prediction of poor Fairfax will be realized. God help us, if it shall be!"

"We must keep cool, and do our best, doctor," said the captain, gravely. "We may weather the danger, after all, if we go about it right."

Captain Brydges was a brave man, and,

better still, he was a God-fearing man. In times of danger he was as cool as on the pleasantest summer day, and under any and all circumstances, he strove to do his duty. He had little hope now that his vessel would escape the fury of the scourge which had broken out so mysteriously in it, but he meant to do his duty to the very last.

During the day the surgeon reported six new cases, and towards night three of the patients died. Under the cover of the darkness, three bodies were thrown overboard.

The next day six more cases were reported by the surgeon, who told the captain they were of the most alarming type. It was impossible to keep the matter secret any longer. It became known to the passengers that the cholera was in their midst, and there at once ensued a panic which baffles all description. Captain Brydges almost wore himself out, trying to induce them to be calm. They seemed utterly incapable of listening to reason. It was horrible to think they were shut up in the narrow space of a ship, and seventeen days from Philadelphia. In vain the captain warned them that their fright would expose them more fully to the disease. They seemed to have entirely lost their self-control, and to be incapable of regaining it.

Six weary terrible days passed away. The ship had now been out seventeen days, and eleven more must elapse before port would be reached. In those six days the pestilence had raged fearfully. One hundred passengers, including six of those in the cabin, and three of the crew, had been seized with it, and fresh victims were being added every day. The deaths reached the frightful number of twelve a day, so that in this time seventy-two persons had died. There seemed no sign of the sickness abating, and on the twentieth day of the voyage the ship's surgeon died. Captain Brydges could not repress the wish that he might be taken, too, for the fearful trial had almost turned his brain.

After the surgeon's death the disease increased with greater rapidity, and the deaths became more numerous. The captain noticed that the fright of the passengers had given place to a recklessness that frightened him. Several times he saw one of the cabin passengers in close conversa-

tion with some of the crew and steerage passengers. Their manner and looks excited his surprise. He called one of the men to him, and asked what they were talking about. The man evaded an answer to the question, and upon its repetition, refused to reply to it. Another was interrogated, with the same result. The captain now became alarmed. He felt sure that the terror of the passengers and crew had driven them to some desperate course. What it might be he hardly dared to think. Land was only eight days distant; but alas! if matters continued unchanged, they might never reach it. Out of three hundred and thirty passengers that had sailed from Liverpool, there were scarcely two hundred remaining, and six of the crew had died. Now that the surgeon had been taken, there was no one on board capable of treating the disease, and nothing could be done to check it. No wonder the stout-hearted sailor's hair turned gray; no wonder the bitter tears coursed down his bronzed cheeks. He had never known such sorrow as this—to see hundreds of fellow-creatures committed to his care perishing, without his having the power to aid them.

There was little ceremony shown to the dead. As fast as they were found to be lifeless, they were thrown into the sea. It was not a time to think of the dead. Humanity required that the only care should be for the living, and it was necessary to remove the corpses at once, so that, if it were possible, the number of victims might not be increased.

On the twenty-third day of the voyage matters came to a crisis. Captain Brydges was standing by the wheel, gazing sadly into the water, when some one touched him on the shoulder. Looking up, he saw that it was one of the passengers.

"Well, Mr. Lane," he said, gravely, "have you any more bad news to report?"

"I have come to say that we have decided to abandon the ship, captain," said the other, firmly.

"Whom do you mean?" asked the skipper, slowly and sternly.

"The passengers and crew. All who are able to go in the boats," was the reply.

"You forget, sir, that I command this ship, and that I will tolerate no interference."

The captain's voice was stern, for he

could not bear that any one should rob him of any of his authority on board "The Sovereign of the Seas."

"I do not forget it," said the other; and his tone was that of a man who is resolved to make good his words. "We would have proposed it to you at first, but we knew you would not consent. You must look at the matter plainly, captain. Nearly one-half of our number have fallen victims to the cholera, and if we remain longer in this ship, we may all die."

"But land is only four or five days distant," said the captain, pleadingly. "I pledge you my honor I'll land you all as soon as we make Cape May."

"Five days may destroy us," replied the passenger. "We must take our fate into our own hands. Men in our position must look out for life before anything else. We have decided to leave the vessel, and make for the land in the boats. We shall be in no more danger than we are now. Will you go with us?"

"Mr. Lane," said the captain, "the owners of this vessel gave her to me to take into port. Please God I shall yet do so; and I warn you that if any of my crew try to leave me, I shall shoot them."

"I feared as much," his companion said. "Do your duty, men."

In a twinkling the captain was seized by six stout men, and, almost before he recovered from his surprise, he was bound securely.

The work of abandoning the vessel began. The boats were made ready, and they were more than sufficient for the accommodation of those who could leave them. Provisions and everything necessary were placed in them. Thirty persons were too ill to be moved, and they were left to their fate. Their companions reasoned not unfairly that they must die, and that their object in deserting the ship would be greatly endangered, if they took with them any who were at all affected by the disease. Captain Brydges, when he found that his threats and appeals were in vain, commanded them to leave him with his ship, declaring that he would share the fate of "The Sovereign of the Seas," whatever it might be. But this command was equally unheeded, and he was placed in one of the boats, without being unbound, and lowered with it over the side.

In consequence of the refusal of the cap-

tain to sanction the proceeding, the command of the party had been entrusted to the first mate, he being the one best fitted to direct the movements of the little flotilla.

At last everything was in readiness. The boats were filled, and were moving off from the ship, when loud cries were heard on the vessel, and the poor wretches who were left to perish came rushing on deck, supplied by their despair with artificial strength. They had discovered the intentions of their companions at the last moment, and had come to beg them not to desert them. Some sank down on the deck, exhausted, while others, supporting themselves by the bulwarks, uttered the most piteous cries. The men in the boats sobbed like children, and the women answered the cries of the doomed ones with heart-rending shrieks. Poor Captain Brydges lay where they had placed him, groaning with anguish. His whole soul revolted at leaving the people on the ship, and his heart was wrung with bitter grief to desert the beautiful vessel of which he was so proud. There was a plunge into the water, then another, and another. The most desperate of the victims were trying to swim to the boats. But their strength was not equal to the task, and they sank one after another into the deep waters.

Such dreadful and unlooked-for scenes seemed to have rendered every one incapable of motion. They were roused by the mate.

"Give way there!" he shouted, savagely. "We must be gone from here at once."

The rowers bent to their oars with a will, and the boats shot off over the blue waters, now as smooth as glass. Not a word was spoken. The mate's boat led the way, and he steered as directly as possible for the coast of New Jersey. An hour passed away. Suddenly there was a cry from one of the boats:

"Look at the ship!"

All eyes were turned in that direction. The vessel had scarcely changed her position. From her decks a heavy thick cloud of black smoke was rising, and soon bright flashes of flame could be seen through the pall, and at last the hull and rigging were wrapped in a solid sheet of fire.

Captain Brydges grew almost frantic as he beheld this, so that he was not unbound until long after "The Sovereign of the Seas" had settled down forever under the waves she had once sailed over so royally. When released, the captain swore he would take vengeance on all concerned in the desertion of the ship, as soon as they should reach the land. During the rest of the voyage he was silent and stern, scarcely replying to what was said to him.

The mate, as we have said, steered right for the Jersey coast. Everything seemed to favor the voyagers. The weather continued mild and delightful, and no new cases of sickness occurred. They had succeeded in leaving the plague behind them. They suffered much, however, from exposure to the sun, and at night exerted themselves unusually to decrease the distance between themselves and land.

At last the Highlands, which have cheered so many a mariner's heart, were seen, and soon after the whole party were safe on American soil. It had been a fearful and trying voyage, and they had commenced it so hopefully and fearlessly! Never, in after life, could any of those who had taken part in the events we have related recall them without a shudder. It seemed strange they lived through them.

Captain Brydges did not execute his threat of vengeance. He was taken sick immediately after landing, and a long and dangerous illness followed. When he recovered he could find no trace of his crew. He never got entirely over the loss of his vessel, and those who knew him best said his grief for the gallant craft did much towards hastening his death, six years later.

THE PRIZE AT SCHOOL.

BOODEY, MARY HELEN

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THE PRIZE AT SCHOOL.

BY MARY HELEN BOODEY.

SILENCE reigned in the schoolroom, except for the scratching of pencils as they moved rapidly over the slates, or the occasional rustle of a hastily-turned leaf. The stir caused by the return to their seats of the scholars who had joined in the last recitation had entirely subsided, when the teacher rapped authoritatively on his desk, thereby attracting toward himself the gaze of upwards of a hundred attentive eyes. He then proceeded to inform the scholars, that on the afternoon of the next day they would receive a visit from the school committee, comprising three well-known gentlemen, who would hear their recitations, and judge of their progress. The class in reading was to be called upon especially, and to the scholar who should best read a short selection given out by the committee, a prize would be awarded—a neatly-bound copy of Whittier's poems, which the teacher held up for inspection as he spoke. The

interest felt in this announcement was evidently very great, and extended from proud Anna Clayton in the back seat to little Jimmy Jackson away down in the front seat of all, who, though he sat right under the teacher's own eyes, would nevertheless contrive to set the whole school in a roar sometimes, by some mischievous action. It is only fair, however, to say that Jimmy generally paid dear for his amusement, and went home a sadder if not a wiser boy after such performances.

On this occasion, just as the interest of the school was at its height, there came the sound of a suppressed snicker from Jimmy's direction, and he was discovered stuffing his handkerchief into his mouth in a vain attempt to hide his laughter.

"Jimmy Jackson!" said the teacher, sternly, "what do you mean by such conduct? What are you laughing at?"

"I couldn't help it, sir, indeed I

couldn't!" pleaded Jimmy, with a somewhat soberer face. "I was only just thinking how funny it would be if Nannie George should get the prize, and how mad Anna Clayton would be."

The corners of the teacher's mouth twitched, while a very general titter ran over the schoolroom, for haughty Anna Clayton was the most unpopular girl in school, and Jimmy's strong dislike for her was well-known, as well as his equally strong liking for the quiet little Nannie George, who, though considerably younger than Anna, was often her superior in scholarship. But the teacher's dignity must be maintained, and he reproved Jimmy quite severely, while Anna Clayton tossed her head scornfully, and Nannie blushed crimson in her bashful confusion, at being mentioned in such a way.

After this little interruption the classes were called as usual, and nothing more was said until after school had closed for the day. Then the busy tongues were let loose and each one had something to say about to-morrow. Anna Clayton's particular friend, Jenny Newton, declared that she knew Anna would take the prize, for, she said, with a curl of her lip—"Of course she can read better than that little Nan George that has to work out for a living, her folks are so poor, and that hasn't a decent dress to come to school in. Why, her best dress aint so good as Anna's cast-off ones! A pretty sight it would be to see her walking up to Mr. Ross with that old faded delaine dress on, to read. I shouldn't think she'd think of such a thing as coming to school at all to-morrow, looking as she does. I'd stay away, if I were in her place."

The last part of this unkind speech was spoken very loud, as if Jenny wished Nannie to hear it, and if such was her desire she did not speak in vain. Every word was like a dagger to Nannie's sensitive heart, and the quick tears filled her eyes to overflowing in a moment, while she silently put on her plain straw hat and gathered up her books, feeling as if she could never be happy again.

"For shame, Jenny!" cried kind Alice Adams, who was always Nannie's friend in time of trouble. "Nannie has just as good a right to win the prize as any of us, and I'm sure I hope she will. As for her dress, you can't say but that it is always clean, and the rest she isn't to blame for.

I wish that you and I were half as good and pretty as she is, or as good scholars, either;" and with this indignant speech Alice went up to Nannie and put her arm around her protectingly.

"O, very well," said Jenny, as she walked away arm in arm with Anna, "if you choose to associate with beggars, you can—*my* taste is different."

Poor Nannie, who had managed to bear Jenny's cruel speeches in silence, sobbed outright at Alice's kind defence, and yielded to so violent a fit of grief that her friend became alarmed. But at last she grew more quiet, though her face was still very sad.

"Alice," said she, as they walked along together, "I wish I could stay at home from school to-morrow, for I never can read before Mr. Ross now. O dear! O dear! why can't I have pretty dresses and a nice home like the other girls? And then, when I try so hard to get my lessons well, to have Jenny and Anna treat me so,—it is so hard—so hard! O dear! I don't believe I have a friend in the world but you!"

"O yes, you have, Nannie," replied Alice. "everybody that knows you likes you except those that are jealous because you can do better than they can. Only the other day Mr. Ross told mother that you were his best scholar, and a very nicely-behaved little girl. What do you think of that? But don't go to thinking of staying away from school to-morrow, for that is just what Anna and Jenny want, I do believe, and it would be a shame to give up to them so. No, you are just as good as any of them, and a good deal better than some, and you mustn't think anything about your dress, for you look well in it, nor their mean speeches, for they don't amount to anything. You know that I'm your friend always, and I want you to promise me that you will go to school to-morrow and read just the best you can when your turn comes."

Nannie hesitated, but at last, promised, and entered the door of the house where she lived with a little more courage in her heart, and a somewhat brighter expression on her tear-stained face.

"O Nannie! are you come?" said Mrs. Carter, as the child entered the large kitchen. "I want you to put your books right away and take the baby, for my head

aches as if it would split, and he's awfully worrisome."

"Yes ma'am," said Nannie, and hastened to obey.

It was no slight task to quiet baby Tommy, who, as his mother had said, was very "worrisome," and Nannie had enough to do without thinking very much of her own sorrows, though she did wish that she could see her own dear mother and tell her all about them. And then she thought how it might trouble her, and concluded that perhaps it was best as it was.

Nannie's mother was a widow, and she had found it very hard indeed to earn bread and shelter for her four little ones. So when Mrs. Carter had offered to take Nannie and give her her board, and allow her to attend the public school for what help she would be about the house, Mrs. George had felt that Nannie must go, though her tears fell fast at the thought of separation. To Nannie it was a bitter blow, but she was a brave little girl, and always tried to do the best she could wherever she was. Mrs. Carter was not unkind, and when she found that the little girl was faithful and true, she allowed her more privileges, and though Nannie had many homesick hours, she consoled herself by striving to do always as she knew her mother would wish her to do if she were present. Her sharpest trials sprang from the heartlessness of a very few of her schoolmates, who envied her for the ease with which she mastered her studies, and grudged her the honors which she so fairly won. They were ungenerous enough, as Alice Adams said, to "twit upon facts," and thus remind poor Nannie of what she would have found it hard to forget under any circumstances, for she was both proud and sensitive. Mr. Ross, Nannie's teacher, saw with pleasure the progress which she made at school, and gave her many encouraging words that were as precious to the child's heart as water is to the thirsty. She had a very soft sweet voice, and read correctly and with a great deal of expression, but she had read very little poetry, while Anna Clayton was very fond of boasting of the compliments she had received as a good reader of verse.

"I know Anna Clayton will get the prize to-morrow," thought Nannie, just before she went to sleep that night, "and I'm sure I shouldn't care if she would only be kind to me—she and Jenny Newton. I

never did them any harm; I don't see why they should hate me so. It is mean in them, and sometimes I almost hate them back again, but I know mother would say 'Don't do wrong, dear, because they do,' and I try to forget it. What a dear girl Alice is!" And so she drifted on into the land of dreams, and dreamed that she went to school and Mr. Ross frowned at her, and told her if she did not behave better he did not want her to come any more. Then she thought Anna Clayton won the book of poems, and threw it at her, so that it struck against her head, and she awoke to find that her head was resting against the hard bedstead, and it was time to get up. She said the little prayer that her mother had taught her, and that somehow always made her feel more cheerful and contented, and then went about her morning duties quite happily, feeling as if she could see Anna Clayton win the prize, without a pang.

The day passed very much as usual until the time arrived for the expected visit of the school committee, when there was a hush of anticipation, soon followed by the entrance of the three gentlemen. The classes were called up, one after another, and at last the reading class took its place. Anna Clayton wore a very stylish showy dress, her hair was crimped and puffed, and she was evidently got up for the occasion. She took her place with an air of pride, and a glance of scornful amusement at Nannie, who wore the faded dress that was her ordinary school-wear, while her dark-brown curls were arranged neatly and simply as usual. Her brown eyes were a little sad, and her face was a little pale, but very sweet, nevertheless.

At first prose selections were given out and read by the scholars, but the real test of their advancement was to be the extract from Whittier. That portion of *Snow-Bound* was selected which commences:

"What matter how the night behaved!"

It need not be said that some of the readers made sad work of it, while others did far better. Anna Clayton read clearly and distinctly, and it was easy to see that she expected no rival. Then little Nannie George took the book, and with kindling eyes she read the beautiful lines as if her soul were in them, bringing out the melody of her soft voice better and better with each line.

There was silence in the schoolroom. Anna Clayton changed color, and tapped the floor nervously with her foot. The teacher arose and said:

"The prize to be bestowed upon the best reader has been allotted by the gentlemen of the committee to Miss Nannie George, and it is with pleasure that I now give it to her, adding to it my commendation for her perfectly good behaviour and rapid progress in her studies since I have been her teacher."

Here he handed the pretty volume to blushing Nannie, who was equally surprised, and pleased at this unexpected honor, but retained her senses enough to say—"Thank you, sir."

Jimmy Jackson, managing to catch the eye of Anna Clayton, who sat with pouting lips, began to heave the most terrible sighs, and to wipe away imaginary tears with the corner of his pocket-handkerchief, varying the performance with grins of sincere delight. As usual, Mr. Ross caught

him at his tricks, and gave him a sharp pinch of the ear, but otherwise let him go unpunished.

As for Alice Adams, she could not have worn a more sunny face if she had received the prize herself, and she kept squeezing Nannie's hand under the seat, to show her joy at the turn affairs had taken.

After school was over Anna and Jenny walked away trying to look indifferent, and Anna was heard to say—"O well! I'm sure I didn't want the book. We've got a great deal nicer copy of *Whittier* than that at home, and I shouldn't have known what to do with it. I suppose Nannie George never owned such a book before."

To Nannie her prize was indeed a prize in more ways than one, and she has read its pages many times over. Since the day when she won it she has made new and kind friends, and she is now the petted adopted child in a wealthy family. But she and Alice Adams are as fast friends as ever.

THE RIVAL MATES.

A Tale of the Sea and Shore.

BY FRED STINSON.

WILL WHITE and Bill Black belonged to the same town, a quiet little country-place in the northern part of New York State. Will was a handsome fair-haired and blue-eyed young fellow, about one-and-twenty, a great favorite with the girls, not only on account of his good looks, but also for his good-nature and merry ways. Black was also a very handsome man, of a very dark complexion, and black curly hair. He was about twenty-six years old, and very taciturn, unless excited; and if made angry, his features assumed a satanical expression that was anything but pleasant to look upon. In fact, he was a man more admired for his figure and face than for his social qualities. He was a thorough seaman, and at the time of which I write he held the position of second mate on board the A 1 half-clipper ship *Ina*, commanded by Captain Nathaniel Coffin, who, of course, as his name implied, belonged to Nantucket.

Will White was also a sailor, and was now, for the first time, enjoying the pleasures and responsibilities of authority as third officer of the *Ina*, he having made one voyage previous in her before the mast, when Black was third mate.

The ship was lying in New York, loading a general cargo for Valparaiso, from whence she was chartered to return with a cargo of copper ore.

Now, both our sailor boys were anxious to go home before sailing, and air their newly-acquired honors, and spend a few dollars of their advance in their native village. So, they each obtained a week's liberty, one to follow the other; and Mr. Black availed himself of the privilege first, and departed for Ambleside, with a determination to see what effect his promotion and manly appearance would have on the belle of the village, pretty Alice Ware. Captain James Ware, her father, was the richest man in the place, and a retired shipmaster. He was very well aware of William Black's disposition towards his daughter, and he rather favored his suit,

for Black had made his first voyage with the old man, and had pleased him by his smartness; and the old gentleman often remarked that there was the making of a smart shipmaster in Bill Black, and that seemed to him the acme of all human greatness. However, as usual, the maiden was not of the same opinion of her father, and she favored White rather more than Bill Black; though up to this time she had thought it advisable to keep two strings to her bow, and had alternately smiled on one and then on the other. I think, though, Master Will got the largest share of smiles. In fact, like all acknowledged belles, she was a coquette, and thus, you see, Messrs. White and Black were rivals. When the least favored suitor returned from his native place, his face appeared more saturnine than usual; but this did not elicit any remarks from White, as he was unaware of his rival's penchant for Alice. Black was equally ignorant of Will's attachment in that quarter, for neither of them had been home at the same time, thus giving the fair Alice a chance to enjoy her passion for flirtation to its fullest extent.

The few questions that White asked Black about the people at home were very briefly answered, and Will started, not very much enlightened as to how things were in his native village, from which he had been gone a year. He was determined, however, to try his luck, and see if he could win the belle of Ambleside. He had wooed her ever since they wore pinafores, and went to school together.

Fortune favored the brave, and when the time came for Will to leave Ambleside and join his ship, Alice rejoiced in a new ring on the forefinger of her left hand, and he was happy in the possession of a lock of brown hair and a tintype—the photograph she had been saving for him having mysteriously disappeared out of her album the week before.

The old captain was duly notified of his daughter's choice; and though he favored the rejected lover, he did not object strongly

to the accepted one, for he doted too much on his daughter (his only child) to cross her in anything. So, with a wish that it had been Bill Black instead of Will White, he ceased to think of it any more, and let things take their course.

The fortunate lover returned to his vessel, and when her topsails were sheeted home there was not a more cheerful voice or a lighter heart among the twenty-eight souls who composed the crew of the *Ina*, than Will White's. He was aware of Black's rejection, for Miss Alice, with a woman's vanity, had informed him of it after she had consented to make him happy.

Ninety-six days after leaving New York the *Ina* came to anchor in the harbor of Valparaiso. During the passage neither of the mates spoke about their love affairs, and Black was ignorant of his rival's success where he had failed.

One Sunday, just before leaving on the homeward passage, a friend of Black's, the mate of a vessel just arrived in port, came on board to see him. White was seated on a caval, on the starboard side, right opposite the window of the second mate's room, reading a book. Any loud talk that might occur inside the room he could hear distinctly, as he was to leeward, and the draft through the open door of the room blew directly out of the window.

The second mate and his visitor were in the room, and from the peculiar gurgling sound and clicking of glasses, it is to be supposed that the two were enjoying themselves. After a while, Black, sailor-like, commenced to show his friend his treasures; such as his revolver, his books, and among other things, his photograph album, which was a ponderous affair that he had bought at some cheap John's auction, and which he kept in sundry folds of old canvas, and called it real morocco. His friend went through the book, commenting on the different pictures in a very lively strain. Some he knew, and some he did not, and those with whom he was unacquainted he asked, Yankee-like, all sorts of possible questions about. At last he came to one that excited his curiosity, for it was turned face in.

"Well, who is this?" he asked. "Your girl, I bet a dollar; and she's so homely that you daren't show her face, and so you keep it turned in."

This floated through the window to Will, for he, too, in looking through the second mate's album, had noticed this picture turned face in, but had never spoken of it, and he was now anxious to hear what reply would be made to the friend's insinuation.

"Yes, she used to be a girl of mine," replied Black. "But let me take it out and show you. You won't talk much about homeliness when you see the face, I reckon. There, what do you think of it now?" And in a triumphant manner he threw the picture he had taken from the album before his friend.

"By George!" was the exclamation; "she is handsome, and no mistake. Where did you run afoul of her?"

"O, she's a little wench I met when I was home up country. She got quite gone on me. She gave me a lot of little keepsakes, and this picture; and I think she would have insisted on giving me herself, but I got sick of it in a couple of weeks, and cleared out. Her name was Ware—Alice Ware. You know her father, Captain Jim Ware?"

The second mate made this speech in quite a nonchalant manner, little thinking that there was a second listener to his insulting remarks and atrocious lie.

Will's first impulse was to go into the speaker's room and demand a retraction of his words, and take possession of the picture; but on second thought, he concluded to remain quiet until the visitor had departed. So he spent the interim walking up and down the deck, fuming and fretting, and growing more wrathful every moment. At last the visitor took his departure; and when Black returned from seeing him off at the gangway, he found the third mate in his room, looking as dark as a thunder-cloud. It did not take the enraged lover long to come at the business in hand. Black had hardly got over the threshold of the door when Will commenced:

"Bill Black, I overheard what you said to your friend about Alice Ware! Now, I tell you it's an infernal lie, all of it; and unless you take it all back, I shall inform him of it, and tell him how you got possession of that picture."

"Well, how did I get possession of that picture?" said Black.

"You stole it," was the answer.

"If I did, is that any of your business?"

questioned Black, growing a little wrathful himself.

"If you don't give it to me inside of a minute, you'll find I'll make it some of my business," was the warlike answer. "That picture was intended for me, and I, for the last time, demand it of you, with an apology for what you said about the original."

It seemed to flash through the second mate's brain that his rival stood before him, and he proceeded at once to prove whether he was right or not.

"So," he sneered, "it was for you Alice Ware gave me the sack; and now you want her picture. Prove me first your right to it, and then perhaps I *may* give it to you."

Instantly White put his hand into his pocket, and drew from it Alice's last letter. He then read enough from it to prove that he was engaged to her, and had a right in demanding her picture and protecting her name from insult; also proving to Black that his suspicions were correct. But this only served to irritate him more, and instead of giving White the picture, he shook it in his face, saying:

"You are engaged, are you? Well, when you get your wife, you may have the picture, and not before; and I'll try my best to bar you from both."

He had hardly finished speaking when White had snatched the picture from his hand, and stowed it away in his pocket, exclaiming, as he did so:

"You'll have to be smarter than that, Bill Black, to bar me from anything that I set out for."

Black's reply to this was a well-directed blow at his rival's head with the leaded-bottom stateroom lamp that stood on his desk. White dodged the missile, and returned the compliment with interest, bringing his left hand in contact with his opponent's face with such force as to make that member strike against the bunk-board in a very savage manner. Black was not long in recovering, however, and then they went at it hammer and tongs. They were pretty evenly matched in size and weight, and for a short time it was nobody's fight, and they went round the small space they had in the stateroom very lively, falling over chests, ripping down desk, bursting out bunk-boards, and demolishing everything that they ran against in the conflict. At last the superior wind and strength of White—

as yet unimpaired by any dissipation—began to tell; and when the captain and mate, who had been informed of the fracas by the steward, arrived on the scene, our hero had his opponent on the floor of the stateroom, and was pummelling him to his heart's content. It was with difficulty that they dragged him off and released Black from his clutches.

The vanquished man did not leave his stateroom for over a week, and even then he showed signs of a severe handling. Will kept the picture, and the cause of the quarrel was never alluded to afterwards.

Not long after this they started on their homeward passage, and nothing of any consequence occurred until in about 358 south latitude, just about off the mouth of the river Plata, when they encountered a very heavy pampero. It was about four bells in the middle watch when it commenced, and all hands were called to close-reef the topsails and furl the courses, all the lighter sails having been taken in before. As soon as the topsails were clewed down, and the foresail and mainsail hauled up, the crew went aloft to the foretop-sail, and commenced to reef, the second mate in the bunt, and the third mate at the weather-easing. After they had taken the first reef in—they were taking them in separate, instead of two reefs in one—White, who, as I said before, was on the weather-yard-arm, sang out for a fresh reef-easing, as he found that the one he had sent up just before dark, he having apprehended a reeling match, had disappeared, probably chafed off. It was but a few seconds after he sang out when a man slid down the lift and handed him a spare earing, and then stepped on the foot-rope alongside of him, and commenced to help him pass the earing, and pick up the dog's-ear of the sail. He did not pay any attention as to who the man was, and it was so dark that, without a very close scrutiny, it would be impossible to tell. He succeeded in getting the earing rove, and the bight passed around his body, so as to give him a better purchase, and commenced hauling out to windward. He had got the reef cringle hauled pretty well out, and was lying back for a last pull, expecting every moment to hear the second mate shout from the bunt to make fast to windward, when he heard the expected voice close to him, hissing:

"Try the South Atlantic for a change.

It is the quickest road to heaven, and a long way from Alice Ware."

At the same time that these words were being spoken there was the flash of a knife, and our hero felt the earing on which he was pulling back give way, and then a stinging sensation in his breast, and the next moment he was struggling in the water. The cry of man overboard immediately resounded above the roar of the wind, and such floatable articles as were knocking round deck were at once flung over the side, in hopes that some of them might strike within reach of the suffering man. The yards were braced up sharp, and the ship was brought up to the wind and hove-to as quickly as possible, and the men were mustered, to find out who it was had fallen over. The second mate supplied the information without any trouble, and informed the captain that White must have rove the earing in such a manner that a strain pulled it right out of the cringle, for there was no part of it to be found; and therefore White must have held on to it when he fell, and taken it over with him.

Any suspicion that the captain might have had of Black's participation in the accident was immediately expelled by his offering to go in the boat in search for his brother officer. This proffer was at once accepted, and calling for volunteers to accompany him, and selecting four, preparations began to launch one of the quarter-boats. All this did not occupy one-half the time it takes to tell it in, but before the davit-guys could be cut and the boat swung outboard, the long-expected pampero struck the ship aback, and, in a few moments she was a dismantled hulk, lying on her beam-ends in the trough of the sea, thrown wheresoever the waves would.

We will now leave the vessel to the mercy of the storm, and return to the victim of Black's revenge, and see how he fared. When he first arose to the surface, after his fall, with the second mate's words still ringing in his ears, and the gleam of the knife still in his vision, he saw the huge hull of the ship gliding by, and a couple of objects thrown from her struck the water close to him. The nearest, which he caught at, proved to be the small lazarette hatch, and the other, which soon washed near enough for him to secure, was one of the stern life-buoys that had been cut adrift by the man at the wheel. Thus fur-

nished with something to float him, our hero felt as comfortable as any man could be under the circumstances. While he was trying to secure the buoy and hatch together with the end of the earing which he held when he fell, the other piece, which Black had unrove out of the cringle and thrown overboard, to hide the only evidence of his crime, floated on to the hatch alongside of him; and with this he managed to fasten himself pretty securely to both his supports. Not until this was effected, and he had a moment for reflection, did he think of the wound in his breast; and then he perceived, for the first time, the knife sticking in his oilskin jacket which he had on (it was raining fiercely); and drawing it out, he recognized it as one belonging to the second mate, a sort of hunting-knife or small bowie. He secured it in his belt, and on examination, found the wound to be slight; and the only pain that he suffered from it was when a sea would dash over him and the salt water would reach it.

It was but a short time after he got secured when the pampero broke in all its fury; and for three hours he thought every moment might be his last. Huge waves would rise and break over him, and he would arise from this involuntary baptism half drowned. If his frail craft had once been swept from under him, there would have been no occasion for going further on with this story; but fortune favored him, and by daylight the sea had gone down considerably. He felt comparatively safe, then, for he knew he was in the track of vessels bound south round Cape Horn, and also those bound north, or to the Rio de la Plata.

The sun was not very high, when on the distant horizon he espied a column of smoke. His heart gave a great bound, and he watched it intently. In a short time he could see plainly that it was nearing him, and in two hours he was safely landed on the deck of the steamship *Cotopaxi*, flagship of the Brazilian navy, bound to Monte Video, to blockade that port until it was captured by the land forces, or Uruguay conceded to the demands of Don Pedro the second emperor of the Brazil.

Will was very thankful for his delivery from the jaws of death, and very grateful to his rescuers, but his ardor was somewhat damped when arriving at Monte Video, and

requesting to be put on board an American vessel there, he was coolly informed that he belonged to the Brazilian navy, and that he was assigned the position of a quarter-master, and if he made any disturbance or refused duty, he would be disgraced and otherwise punished. He saw that argument or resistance was of no use, so he quietly took up his line of duties, and mentally resolved to desert upon the first opportunity. Two or three days after he had arrived in Monte Video, another war vessel came in and her captain reported that they had picked up a boat bottom up, and a quarter-board, and other things that indicated the foundering of a ship called the Ina. When White heard this, he had reason to say, "It is all for the best."

We will now skip over a space of two and a half years, during which time our hero had made several attempts to escape, but had succeeded in none, and finally had given up the idea, and contented himself as best he could, and had risen to the rank of second lieutenant. This was no uncommon occurrence, for the Brazilian navy was dreadfully in want of good officers, and more than two-thirds were English and Americans attracted by the large pay and easy times.

White had written home a dozen times, but he never had received any answer to his letters, and he consequently got tired of writing. The reason of his not receiving any reply was simple enough; the government never allowed any letters to be forwarded without first opening them; and then there was so much in his ridiculing their fighting qualities and government, that the official whose duty it was to conduct this espionage on the foreign officers tore his letters up with rage.

In two years and a half from the time of White's compulsory enrollment under the Brazilian flag, Monte Video surrendered by having a traitor inside the city who unlocked the gates; and there being no more fighting to do the navy was reduced, and a great many of the officers were discharged, and among them our friend.

With his pockets very well lined with doubloons and milreas, he started homeward in a coffee trader bound for Baltimore, and determined not to write of his coming out of spite for their not answering his letters.

His mind was not very anxious about his

folks, for he had none except an aunt who had brought him up as close as possible, and shipped him off to sea as soon as she could. His principal thoughts were about his betrothed, speculating as to whether she had broken her vow to him, and all such things as long-absent lovers will think about.

In thirty days after leaving Rio Janeiro he arrived in Baltimore, and from there took the first train for New York, and thence home. Arriving there he frightened his aunt into hysterics, for she had believed him dead for two and a half years. When she sufficiently recovered, he learned from her news that made his blood boil. Bill Black was that evening at seven o'clock to be married to his promised wife, Alice Ware, who believed him dead at the bottom of the sea. The match had been brought about mainly by her father, who had used his influence and procured Black a ship, and he was now Captain William Black, and was going to take his bride with him to sea. It appeared that when the Ina was thrown on her beam-ends, Black, the captain and several men were on the after-house deck, and the mizzen-mast breaking in the cabin, took the top of the house off and floated clear of the sinking ship with the men on it. They remained in this predicament until the evening of the next day, when a homeward bound barque picked them up and carried them into Philadelphia. On his arrival home Black had told the story of White's loss, and also about his offer to go after him and what it resulted in, all of which was duly endorsed by Captain Coffin. This story and the non-arrival of letters of course settled it without a doubt in the minds of everybody; and White's return now looked very much like the sea giving up its dead.

To be married at seven o'clock; it was now half past six. Where was she to be married? At her father's house. A moment's reflection, and then he asked himself the question could he do it? Yes! Should he do it? Yes! And he started to put his purpose into execution. In a twinkling he had his chest, which had been brought up from the depot, open, and taking several articles therefrom, he put them in his pocket and bounded out, shaping a course for Captain Ware's house. It was over two miles, and he had about twenty-five minutes to do it in, but he felt confident that

by running all the way he could accomplish it.

A lovely-looking bride was Alice Ware, as she stood up in her father's parlor to be wedded to a man she loved not; lovely-looking, with an air of indifference and half defiance.

Between her father (she had no mother to take her part) and the indefatigable Black, they had worried her into it. Her father had constantly dinned it into her ears for two years; not harshly, so that she could find heart to rebel, but quietly and insinuatingly loading her with presents and supplying her every wish; dwelling frequently on the nobleness of Black's conduct in offering to go to the rescue of his rival. And then the lover, whenever he was at home—and he contrived to go short voyages and be at home a great deal—assiduously paying her every attention possible, and obeying her every look or word with the docility of a faithful dog, inwardly cursing himself for his folly, and impatient for the day that would unite them, and he be master.

The bridegroom, as he stood before the man of God with the bride, never looked to better advantage. His dark and usually gloomy countenance was lighted up with a triumphant smile, and his dress was as near perfection as a New York tailor could make it.

The bride was elegantly dressed, and wore some costly jewels, for the old captain was quite wealthy, and nothing pleased him so much as to have it show on the person of his daughter. One small ornament she wore that came neither from the father nor bridegroom. They had both objected to it, but without avail, for she was determined to wear it, and as usual woman's obstinacy prevailed. It was a small gold anchor with a blue ribbon tied in the ring, and on the stock and shank was engraved "From Will to Alice," and a date about three years old; and opposite to "Will" on the stock was "Lost at sea, lat. 85 deg. 5 min. S., lon. 50 deg. 12 min., with the day and date.

The marriage ceremony which was of the Episcopal form, had just commenced; the clergyman had asked the usual question, "if any man can show just cause why these two may not lawfully be joined together, etc.," and was about proceeding with the service, when the door was burst open and a voice cried, "Hold on! I can show just

cause and sufficient;" and stepping between the bride and groom, he turned around, face to the company, and they saw Will White, as one risen from the dead. In an instant all was confusion. The bride fainted in her father's arms, and the groom stood white and speechless with terror. At length he found voice to say, "Will White, and alive?"

"Yes, and alive, no thanks to you."

Reassured that it was White and no supernatural visitor, Black began to regain his courage, and demanded that the ceremony should go on.

"I forbid it!" said White.

"By what right?" angrily demanded the bridegroom.

"Come with me a moment, and I will tell you. Captain Ware, will you accompany us?"

The captain who had delivered his daughter into the hands of some of the ladies present, acquiesced, and the three went together out on the lawn in front of the house.

The first to speak was White. "Captain Ware," said he, "you have heard the story how I fell off the Ina's fore-topsail-yardarm and was supposed to have been drowned."

"Yes!"

"Well," continued White, "you heard an infernal lie. Look, do you know what that is?" and he produced something from his pocket.

"Know what it is?" said the old man. "I knew the use of it long before you were born. It is the pieces of a reef-earring."

"Does it look like a rope that would easily part?" questioned White.

"I should say not," answered the captain, after examining the rope closely. "I should say that it had been cut, though it looks somewhat frayed."

"And it was cut, and by the man next to me on the yardarm; do you know who that was?"

The old man looked intently at Black and bowed his head.

"It is a lie," cried the accused. "You rove it some bungling way so that it unrove with the strain, and you've cut it yourself to get up this story and ruin me."

"If I rove it so bunglingly, I deserve drowning. But if that is not sufficient evidence look at this. You were afraid that I might escape a watery grave, so you gave me this to make your work more complete.

And here's the mark you left; can you deny that, or that this knife is yours?" Saying this, White handed the old captain the knife, and throwing back his shirt and vest, showed a scar on his left breast some three inches long. "Now," he said, addressing the culprit, who was shaking with rage and fear at these unexpected evidences of his guilt, "I will give you until to-morrow morning to leave this town forever; if not, to-morrow night you will sleep in the county jail. What do you say? Will you go or stay?"

Captain William Black said not a word, but turned down the pathway that led to the public road, and the village of Ambleside knew him no more.

People wondered why he left the town so suddenly and mysteriously, but White and the captain kept their own counsel, and no

one else but Mrs. Alice White ever heard the story.

The little gold anchor has another inscription on it now under the one "Lost at sea." It reads "Found at Ambleside," with the day and date of his return. Captain White took the ship intended for Captain Black, and for many years prospered as a shipmaster. When Captain James Ware was laid away to rest alongside of his beloved wife, his grandson James Ware White, aged twelve, was left sole heir to all the property, and this young gentleman declares that as soon as he is old enough he will give half of it to his little sister Alice, and half to his mother, and then go to sea like his father and earn a lot for himself; and his mother says, kissing him, "God bless the boy!" And Captain Will with little Alice in his arms responds "Amen."

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS.

BY GUSSIE M. WHITMAN.

"GEORGIE, do stop that tiresome practicing! I am completely out of sorts this afternoon, so you must put that new song aside, and do your prettiest to restore me to good humor!"

Georgina Truman whirled herself round on the music stool, and gave her disconsolate sister Christine a stare of perfect astonishment; at which unsympathetic action Miss Christine flung herself upon the sofa, and endeavored to shed a few tears.

Georgie laughed lightly, seemingly regardless of her sister's real or fancied grief.

"Well, indeed, if this isn't the very essence of sentimentalism! A fair young damsel *en dishabille* in a dainty white wrapper, hair all unbound, falling over her slender shoulders, throwing herself in an agony of tears upon a sofa, and all because after said young lady has been attempting to make an indelible impression upon the heart of a certain young and distinguished physician, he has evinced an utter disregard of all her aforesaid endeavors, and positively *will not call*!" And Georgie's plump little form shook with merriment.

At these words Christine rose from her reclining position, and exclaiming, "You know it is no such thing; and really, sister, you are very unkind!" walked to the door, with an air intended to show that her dignity had received a mortal wound.

Georgie jumped—she scarcely ever walked—to her sister's side, and wound her arms about her neck.

"Now, Chrissy darling, don't look so terribly offended! You know I was only teasing you. How could I help it, when I knew just what ailed you? You know yourself it's so, now don't you?" peeping, with her merry eyes of clear brown, into Christine's tearful ones of the same shade.

"O," she answered, flushing faintly, "I just feel sort of done up, if you can understand me. Mamma has been giving me one of her lectures, and papa *will not* give me the money I want for my dress, and—and it is provoking, and I'd as lief you should know it as not, that Dr. Farwell has

not called, when we have invited him here, and showed him every possible attention. I wouldn't care so much about it if I didn't feel sure I knew the reason. Don't you think Florrie Wyman artful, Georgie? that demure little pink-and-white creature, with such light blue eyes! Just to think of his being so attentive to *her*! I can't understand why every stranger is so attracted towards her, when we look and act just as well as she!" Christine drew up her tall slender form, and flung back her hair with a haughty toss of her head.

"Why, Florrie's a splendid girl! I don't wonder Dr. Farwell was charmed with her. For pity's sake, don't get jealous, Chris! Now rumor saith the doctor is engaged to a young lady in his native country; so even if Florrie did not engross all his attentions, it would be of no use for you to try and make a conquest. Chris Truman!" Georgie screamed, "he's coming now."

"Christine! Georgie!" cried a shrill voice from the dining-room, "Dr. Farwell is coming, and you must be ready to receive him. I'm coming in when I get ready. Look your best, Christine."

Georgie sat down convulsed with laughter. Christine, glowing like a rose, was flying up stairs two steps at a time, and the doctor was at the gate. Georgie glanced at the large mirror over the mantel, and decided to stand her ground in her white *pique* and blue *basque*. She gave her short wavy black hair a bit of a fling back from her low white forehead, and ran to answer the doctor's rap with a very determined mouth, while her eyes were fairly twinkling. She ushered him into the drawing-room, talked and laughed, played and sang, and did her utmost to make the time fly quickly while those elaborate toilets were being made.

Mrs. Truman entered soon, tall, slim and talkative. She wore a gay poplin, a lace cape over her shoulders, and a point lace collar, fastened with a diamond pin—an heirloom—which flashed as she crossed the room to greet her visitor. A rather odd woman, her neighbors said, always complaining of nervousness, and grieving

over her lot and her trials. If anything occurred to ruffle her by no means saintly temper, she evinced her displeasure by retreating to the seclusion of her own room, where she sulked for a fortnight or so, according to the extent of the offence. Her husband, poor man, often received her nervous harangues and tantalizing speeches on such occasions, always bearing them so patiently that, really, it was wonderful how he could be possessed of so much endurance. She could be all politeness and smiles when she chose, if she was queer and disagreeable at times; and Dr. Farwell was being pleasantly entertained by mother and daughter, when the graceful Christine made her appearance, with hair arranged *a-la-mode*, and dress elegant and stylish. She performed her most brilliant waltzes and polkas, and held her head most loftily, and gave the doctor melting glances out of her brown orbs, and talked and smiled, and showed her white teeth most delightfully, yet felt secretly chagrined to think the handsome gentleman took it all so coolly, and sat as if reading her with his sharp bluish-gray eyes. Georgie was longing to get by herself and have a good laugh, they *did* look and act so!

"Dr. Farwell, you perceive I was right when I told you my sister was the chief musician," said she, while Christine's taper fingers flew over the keys. "I can only play a few simple songs by ear. I never can go through the tedious routine of learning to play scientifically!"

"I am fond of those songs you were singing as well as of brilliant performances, Miss Truman. Your friend Miss Wyman improvises charming little accompaniments, does she not?"

Georgie's eyes beamed.

"Yes, she really does; and she sings sweet pathetic little pieces just like her dear little self!" she said, with enthusiasm.

The doctor's blue eyes met Georgie's with a glance which told of his perfect agreement with her in her opinion of Miss Wyman.

Christine heard it at the piano, and gave her head a haughtier toss, and flourished her fingers more airily still; and when the doctor had gone, and the sisters were alone, she said, with vexation in voice, look and manner:

"It's too bad, Georgie! I believe he's desperately in love with Florrie Wyman,

and mamma will be so vexed if he should marry her! I'm sure, she's as plain as can be, now isn't she?"

"Why, I don't think she is. But you know we have never agreed on that subject. I think she's a charming little girl; and if I didn't know you were set on making a conquest, I'd do anything to influence him in Florrie's favor."

"O yes! as if you hadn't begun already! I do wish you wouldn't speak to him, or any one, of her when I am present. I really don't like it. I can't help it if it is selfish!"

"How foolish, sister, for you to feel so! If he should love Florrie he never would have you, and there are others in the world beside him. I don't think he's anything extraordinary, I'm sure. Did you ever see such a bushy head as he has?"

Christine's face was crimson, and her eyes flashed as she replied:

"I liked Dr. Farwell the first time I saw him, and I don't think he is altogether indifferent to me; and I *must* improve this opportunity of getting a husband, to please mamma, if nothing else. As for the fact of there being other young gentlemen in Merton, or anywhere, I don't care to marry anybody who comes along—any of these little, beardless, insignificant fellows that walk our streets! You might!"

Georgie colored, and answered playfully:

"I don't care a pin for what you say or mean, Christine. I think Guy Newton is just as good and lovable as Dr. Farwell, if he isn't as tall and as handsome. He has not a head like a mop, anyway! Why do you not buy him a dozen bottles or so of hair-dressing, Chris?"

"Stop your nonsense, Georgie! You know mamma never will be willing for you to have Guy, neither will papa; so you may as well give him up."

"That's what I *wont* do!" rejoined determined Georgie.

Dr. Farwell, the young physician who was an object of so much interest to Miss Christine, had come that summer to the busy little town of Danbury, about two miles from the village of Merton, where Mr. Truman resided. He had just graduated at Edinburgh, and, with a clerical friend of his, was travelling in search of a suitable place in which to practise his profession. Danbury seemed to be just the place, and he had resolved to establish

himself there. He had become acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Truman at a social gathering, and had been invited to take tea at their residence, before any one else in Merton had taken the trouble to invite him; so the Trumans considered him almost as their own especial property. If Mrs. Truman had nervous headache, or little Miss Jane a sore finger, or the wee Kate a scalded hand, recourse was had at once to Dr. Farwell for remedies, or a professional visit. So, after our hero's call at the paternal residence, he found himself a sort of indispensable requisite to the family. The eldest scion of the house of Truman had long been prepossessed in favor of the medical profession; so here was a fine opening. Dr. Farwell offered to give the youth private instruction at his office in Danbury, so that after a year he would be able to enter college. Everything seemed favorable for Christine's hopes; the fair winds of fortune and maternal and paternal influence seemed likely to waft the maiden on to the glorious haven of matrimony; so she thought to herself. Alas for human expectations!

The sweet little Florrie Wyman, who was such a bone of contention between the sisters, was a young lady residing with a maiden aunt at some distance from their home. This good aunt, when the bustling season of middle life had gone, and age came quietly on, had wearied of living alone in her snug little dwelling, with its well-stocked shop and trim garden behind; so she went in search of some one to cheer her declining days, and found that one in the person of her niece Florrie, whose pleasant country home was thirty miles distant. At the time my story commences she had been with her for seven years, tending the store, helping Aunt Charity make currant jelly and plum preserves, washing, scrubbing, ironing, starching and sewing, singing cheerily all the while, as if she had not left her dear old home in the country, where were her parents, and brothers and only sister, to live with an old lady, who, with all her kindness and goodness of heart, had also many peculiarities such as belong to a certain age of female existence in the state of single blessedness, and which peculiarities often made Florrie's life wearisome, and made the tears come to her sweet blue eyes. She had met Dr. Farwell at a friend's house in Danbury,

where the Trumans had made his acquaintance, and had noticed his preference for her society; but in her simple guileless heart she never thought of falling in love with the handsome doctor, especially while Christine Truman was giving her such glances out of her large brown flashing eyes, as if she would annihilate her.

She went on with her household duties, and tried to please Aunt Charity as well as she possibly could, and resolved not to put herself in the way to receive Dr. Farwell's attentions at any time, that she might not incur the wrath of Miss Truman. She saw him quite often at church, sitting in Mr. Truman's pew with papa and tall mamma Truman, white-haired Charlie Truman, the young follower of St. Esculapius, and the Misses Truman, all radiant in their Sunday attire, and smiles like sunshine. Sometimes the doctor's eye turned to the pew where sat the lovely girl, with her white hat shading her fair brow, and her blue eyes would suddenly meet his, and the sweet rose-bloom would tinge the delicate fairness of the rounded cheek, and the witching orbs would drop beneath his admiring gaze. O Christine! if you had seen it all you would have read the death warrant of your fond aspirations then and there.

Winter came with snow-wreaths, and ice-chains, and chilling storm-winds, and the worthy doctor still continued to practise at Danbury. He seemed to be a general favorite with the inhabitants of the town and the regions round about, and altogether his affairs were in a very flourishing condition. Young Charles Truman was making remarkable progress in his studies, and Christine thought she was doing the same in gaining the doctor's affections. He came so often to see them, and was so sociable, and agreeable, and kind! Mamma Truman went to Danbury shopping very often with her stylish equipage, and her eldest daughter by her side. How kindly she smiled when she met Dr. Farwell, and how pressing her invitations to call at any time and see them, and dine, or take tea, in fact, to "make himself quite at home," as he was so far away from his own home; they would always be delighted to have his company, etc., etc., and how could he resist the affable dame?

The old year sighed, and groaned, and moaned, and went out at last, and the

beauteous joyous January morning dawned, and the icicles glittered, and the snow sparkled, and Florrie Wyman awoke with a light and happy heart, donned her neat dress of blue and brown plaid, pinned her simple tatted collar about her neck, combed her light hair smoothly, and wound a ribbon round it, previous to going down to prepare Aunt Charity's coffee. Down the dark staircase, out into the small dim kitchen, lighting the fire, in the cooking-stove, filling the kettle, setting the round table for two, in and out she flew, cutting bread, tripping down cellar for preserves—was there ever such a sweet merry sparkling sunbeam anywhere, within or without, as was that dutiful cheerful niece of that good maiden Aunt Charity? Down came that worthy personage, slightly limping as she walked, for many years ago she had been thrown from a sleigh, and received a severe injury which resulted in a slight lameness. Perhaps if this had not been she might have enjoyed the pleasure of a home not as lonely as hers had been for many years. She had toiled hard, early and late, and had gained quite a competency. Her life was somewhat sunnier now than ever, for light tripping feet took the many steps which she had been obliged to take, and a fair young face behind the counter in the little store attracted many more thither than were wont to go. Florrie was so cheery, and merry, and obliging, people said. Aunt Charity went to the mirror in the corner, and looked in, and gave her black lace cap, with its bows of purple velvet, a twitch and a jerk, more from the force of habit than from any other reason; she never passed that glass in the corner of the kitchen without looking in.

Florrie came out from the parlor, where she had been lighting a fire in the "Franklin," and greeted auntie most heartily and lovingly, and received as hearty and loving a greeting in return. She had a small gift, a pair of comfortable muffatees, for the good lady; and Aunt Charity had a pretty gold brooch for her niece, which was an unexpected gift to Florrie.

Aunt Charity got her Bible and seated herself in the old-fashioned rocking-chair by the window, where the glorious morning light poured in; and after their short yet fervent devotions were over, they enjoyed their bountiful meal together. As it was a holiday, there was not much to be

done in Miss Dutton's dwelling on that New Year's Day; so Florrie hurried to clear away breakfast, and sit with auntie in the cheerful parlor, knitting her beaded mats for the fair which was to be held the next summer, and in which Aunt Charity took a great interest.

The village of Merton was alive withurchins in their Sunday attire, crowding the street corners, shouting, and enjoying their fire-crackers and torpedoes; indeed, there seemed to be little else going on. The practice of New Year's calls had not been universally established in Merton; some, indeed, of the most fashionable observed the custom; but the principal attraction of New Year's Day was the giving of large family parties by all who could possibly do so. So, as the dinner hour drew near, numbers of people, decked in gala attire, might have been seen wending their way, baby-carriage and all the accompaniments, to the hospitable dwellings wherein they hoped to regale themselves with the good things of this life.

The Trumans were astir this bright and beautiful day, for they had been invited to the house of Mr. Truman's brother to spend the day in festivity; and the feminine head of the family meant to accept the invitation for herself, husband, hopeful son and youngest cherubs, but the Misses Christine and Georgie received a bit of sage maternal advice the day before, to the effect that "they ought to remain at home, and keep up a good fire in the drawing-room grate, for surely Dr. Farwell would call; he had been accustomed to city practices, and if he cared anything for one of them, which she was sure he did, he would certainly be there next day."

"Isn't this splendid?" exclaimed Georgie, when the time had come, and the rest of the family had gone, leaving the sisters alone. "I'm going to enjoy this rocking-chair and fire, now, I assure you!" And she drew the chair close to the grate. "Isn't it a relief to get the children off once in a while? I don't like the idea of staying at home all day a bit, though. Come, let's go out and have a nice walk. We can do as we like here in this place, and I'm dying to show my new Robroy plaid."

"If the doctor should call early, we might; but we must not go till he comes; mamma would be enraged."

"And you most dreadfully disappointed if he should come in our absence, and find his charming Christine did not care enough about him to wait for his coming. Ah me!"

"I don't believe he's a bit more acquainted with Florrie Wyman than he was when he came here last summer, and met her at Mrs. Baker's; do you, Georgie?"

"No, I think not. She scarcely ever goes out anywhere, and I don't think she has met him since, except at church. I have seen them exchange glances once in a while there."

"Georgie Truman, hold your tongue! You know as well as I do that a person as highly educated and as intellectual as Dr. Farwell, has no desire to become acquainted with a person so far beneath him as that little rustic, old-maidish ignoramus, Florrie Wyman. He'll surely call to-day, and perhaps he may propose!"

Christine was standing by her sister's side, looking into the gilded mirror above her. Her tall slender form was arrayed in a rich robe of crimson, falling to the floor in a sweeping train. Soft white lace encircled her delicate throat and wrists; a small gold chain was her only ornament; her hair was arranged in the all-prevailing *chignon*, with a crimson velvet bow among the puffs and waves falling over her forehead. Her eyes were bright beneath their long brown lashes, and her cheeks were rosy with her glowing thoughts.

Georgie looked up at her and thought her a pretty picture standing there so stately, and proud, and queenly. All the surroundings of the sisters bespoke comfort and luxury. Lace curtains with gilt mouldings, adorned the windows, where hung handsome bead baskets filled with rare grasses. A marble-topped centre-table stood in the middle of the room, bearing an elegant lamp and an abundance of ornaments, as likewise did the extensive "what-not" and the broad mantel; for Mrs. Truman was remarkable for her extreme love of profuse decoration, and filled every niche and corner with busts, vases or pictures. The oil paintings on the walls were the work of Christine and her sister, as also the waxen lilies that bloomed beneath their glass shades, on each corner of the mantel.

Christine paced the tapestry carpet impatiently, ever and anon glancing out of the window as if expecting some one.

They were really two wonderful girls, those sisters. Though they could well afford it, the Trumans kept no servants, and the baking, cooking, pickling, preserving; house work and dressmaking were done by the busy hands of Christine and Georgie, sometimes assisted by their nervous mamma, who was oftener engaged in musing over her own woes and feelings, mental and physical, than in affairs pertaining to domestic economy.

"Why, Georgie!" cried Chrissie suddenly, as hearing the sound of bells she went to the window and looked down the street; "here's Guy Newton with a horse and sleigh, and he's stopping at our gate! He must mean to take you driving. What will mamma say! Will you go?"

"Go? of course I will!" exclaimed Georgie, jumping up, her face aflame with blushes. "Now doesn't he look handsome, Chris, almost as *distingue* as Dr. Farwell!"

She ran to the door to welcome him, and bidding him wait in the drawing-room—where Christine was icy and reserved to the highest degree—she put on her Robroy and velvet hat with snowy plume, and scarlet buds, and appeared, radiant and exuberant, ready for a drive over the glistening roads.

Mamma and papa Truman looked out at sound of bells, and saw their truant Georgina whirled away in a sleigh by the side of the forbidden Mr. Newton, and looked piqued, and then concluded not to say anything, like wise parents. If only Christine could marry Dr. Farwell, let Georgie go as her inclination led her; but they must have one married well, which meant position, wealth, refinement, intellectual enjoyment, all the outside show and glitter of this life which Guy Newton had it not in his power to bestow upon Georgie.

Aunt Charity was resting on the stuffed lounge in the parlor, after knitting busily on a tidy which was to grace the "fair" table next summer in company with the work of Florrie's fair hands, which were fashioning pretty articles as she sat by the window, neat and smiling, in a blue merino and white ruffle fastened with her morning's gift, while a shining blue rosette adorned her smooth light bands of brown hair. The narrow wooden sidewalk ran close by the window, and frequently the sound of cheery voices and rippling laughter made her push aside the crimson curtains, and look out to see who were so merry and gay outside.

How comfortable was that snug parlor with its blazing "Franklin" fire, its great easy rocking-chairs and tiny cabinet organ in the corner, which gave forth its sweetest sounds at the touch of Florrie's small fingers at the holy twilight hour, when Aunt Charity sat by the fire, musing in her chair, and the shadows flickered on the white walls so grotesquely!

"I suppose Dr. Farwell will call at Mr. Truman's to-day," said Aunt Charity, after a long silence. "He seems very attentive to Christine; that is, whenever I've seen them together."

"Aunt, there's a sleigh at the door!" And Florrie peeped out behind the curtain again. "Why, auntie, it's Dr. Farwell, I do declare! What can he be coming here for!" And she pulled out her needles in her trepidation, and catching up yarn, beads and all in a tremendous snarl, hurried with them to the table, and fairly went round and round, as the great brass knocker went rat-tat-tat, while Aunt Charity lay shaking with laughter!

"You must go, auntie, you certainly must!" And Florrie in distress ran from the room to get cool and calm.

So auntie got up, and gave her cap a twitch as was her wont, and welcomed the Dr. Farwell of Christine Truman's expectations, who inquired for her niece; and upon her entering, all serene and charming, evinced his extreme pleasure at meeting her, by word, look and manner, and made a remarkably long call. Prepossessing and agreeable as he was, he quite won the heart of Miss Dutton; of her susceptible niece I will say nothing at present, save that if blushes are any indication of affection of the heart, hers must have been a desperate case indeed, certainly requiring medical aid!

"Well, sister Chrissy! did you run to the window when you heard the sleigh coming, thinking 'twas the doctor? O sister, sister! your anticipations are doomed never to be realized, for Dr. Farwell's sleigh and pony were at Miss Charity Dutton's door as we came by, and he just came out a little while ago, and went down the Danbury road again!"

Christine threw down the album at which she had been looking, and said indignantly, her cheeks blazing, "It's too bad! I declare I *will* not go out a step to-day; I'll sit and sulk it through! That little insig-

nificant chit of a thing! And we have done so much for him, too! I'll tell papa to employ another doctor at once!"

"O Chris! don't be foolish! Haven't I had a royal time to-day! The sleighing is just splendid, and O, we passed Uncle John's, and I saw mamma's face at the window, and nodded and smiled as gayly as I could. I felt just as if I didn't care a bit for anybody—sort of independent and saucy," and Georgie rushed up stairs singing.

"Hallo, sis! I guess you're blue this afternoon," said Charlie Truman, coming in and throwing open the piano. He was tall and verdant-looking, with extremely light hair, and pale thin face, unadorned as yet by any hirsute appendages. He sat on the music-stool as if afraid of the piano, and reached out his long arms, and flourished his large hands over the keys as if he imagined himself a most extraordinary performer.

"Farwell was up to call on Miss Wyman, wasn't he? Queer he did, any way! Guess you're sulky about it, aren't you, eh?"

"Charlie, can't you keep still! I'm tired of hearing the piano, and your tongue, too!" The fair face was positively scowling.

"Well, Miss Truman, I desire to make a most profuse apology for my unintentional interruption of your afternoon's peace and quietness," rattled the doctor elect, in his short rapid tones, "and by your leave, most woe-begone damsel, I shall now retire to my *sanctum sanctorum*." And the door shut after him with a slam.

The sulks were obliged to depart after a time, for everything went on the same in the village of Merten, and in the town of Danbury, too, in spite of Mrs. Truman's indignation at the dereliction of the doctor. They met him as often as ever during the winter and spring; once or twice he honored them with a visit, sometimes professionally, for Mrs. Truman still abounded in ailments, and wearied him with the grievous catalogue. Still he seemed no nearer falling in love with the fair Chrissy, although it was evident she was extremely fond of him. Florrie had not met him except at church; and the Trumans, at least all excepting Georgie, imagined he could not be particularly interested in that direction, or he would be more marked in his attentions to Miss Wyman.

When sunny June came with summer

splendors again, the young people of Merton had a picnic about twelve miles from the village, near a small lake.

The day before it took place Florrie received a note from Dr. Farwell requesting that she would accompany him to the picnic next morning. She answered it immediately, telling him of her aunt's indisposition, which required her constant presence and attention at home; otherwise, she would be delighted to accept his invitation. The doctor then invited Christine Truman, who, well pleased, would not lose the opportunity of being seen driving with the handsome gentleman in his stylish carriage; all blissfully ignorant of the fact that she was only there because the object of his choice could not be, and that all the time he was longing for the society of the sweet little maiden, who was such a contrast to the stately miss beside him.

"I'm sure, mamma!" she said afterward, when she knew of it, "I wouldn't have gone one step if I had known he invited Flo Wyman first!"

Fragrant June soon slips into melting August, and this sultry month brought the day for the annual fair of the society to which Aunt Charity belonged, and for whose welfare she labored. Who so active, and bustling, and energetic as she, on this particular morning? Up betimes, and hard at work, getting her wares together to be conveyed to the huge tent erected in a field near by, where were congregated dozens of the fair sex, arranging tables, and running hither and thither in search of something they knew not what.

Florrie was tired and uncommonly sober, auntie was evincing her possession of the peculiarities of her fraternity, and our little heroine had much ado to keep her temper unruffled; and she wished heartily that there were no such things as fairs. After everything was settled, and spread out, and arranged to Miss Dutton's supreme satisfaction, Florrie must array herself in becoming costume, and take her stand behind auntie's table and not leave it upon any condition. How her poor feet ached, and her head, too! and her face was so flushed, and she felt ready to fly, while across the room behind their mamma's table were the Truman maidens, so delightfully cool-looking in their snowy muslins trimmed with blue lace.

The young doctor from Danbury saun-

tered in during the evening, when the place was a-glitter with lamps, and all was gay like some fairyland. Mrs. Truman put on an extra smile when she saw his face in the doorway; she had been watching for his appearance all the time—and the blue lace trembled, and the muslins fluttered, and a certain heart almost beat aloud, but the gentleman walked straight past without noticing the fluttering at all, and went over to Miss Dutton's stand, where tired Floy was selling five cent emery bags to little rosy-cheeked girls, and two dollar lamp-mats to swains who desired to make presents to their sweethearts standing by them so demurely. Florrie's hand trembled in his as he greeted her, and when he asked in a low voice if she could leave for a short walk, she felt as though the room suddenly went round.

Auntie Dutton soon pounced upon a poor unlucky mortal to take the place of her niece behind the table, and the pair went out under the glittering evening sky, and enjoyed a walk and a pleasant talk together, much to the chagrin of certain feminine creatures, but to the sweet delight of Charity Dutton, who, loving Floy as her own self, rejoiced to see her sought after by one so good and noble as Dr. Farwell.

Well, the blessed September came, and the aforesaid society determined to have a great picnic on an island some distance down the river. All were to meet at the church, from thence to walk down to the water, where boats were in readiness to convey them to their destination. As Georgie Truman was walking with her sister, she turned and saw Florrie Wyman standing alone as if waiting for some one. She ran back, and said, "Come, Floy, aren't you going with us?"

"I'm waiting for some one I have invited," replied Florrie. "I don't want to go till I know whether they're coming or not!"

"Whether he's coming or not, you mean! Of course he'll come, dear! Look, Florrie, isn't that he on the river in a canoe! O Floy, Floy! Come, he won't know where you are!"

And sure enough 'twas he, come with a little canoe after Miss Wyman, to take her to the island picnic! He stepped lightly on shore, and spying the object of his search among the smiling lasses gathered there, went straight up to her and said:

"Miss Wyman, will you trust yourself in my little canoe? I think it quite safe."

And Florrie, looking up into his kind and loving eyes, felt all her timidity vanish, and allowed him to help her down the bank into the canoe, in which he had arranged a comfortable seat for her. Away they went over the sparkling blue water, and Christine saw them, and became morose and silent; and Georgie saw them, too, and was glad for Florrie, and was happy as a lark—for was not Guy Newton by her side in the boat?

So Chrissie leaned over and played with the cool water, and looked at no one, and said nothing, but experienced envious, jealous feelings arising in her heart towards her friend Florrie.

Everybody was certain upon that day that Dr. Farwell and Florrie Wyman would make a match, if they never were so inclined before. He hovered round her wherever she went, like a guardian angel, and who could help it! So pure, and sweet, and good as she was!

Before the rest of the picnickers returned, the tiny canoe with its interesting freight was seen skimming the calm waves, paddled skillfully by its owner, and soon the bank was gained again, and in the deepening twilight they walked homeward. Florrie's arm trembled in his, and her heart beat strangely, for had not her companion intimated that day more plainly than ever that she was the one of his choice? And now he says with voice full of emotion:

"Miss Wyman, Florrie, you are dearer to me than all the world, and I want you to be my little wife!"

"Dr. Farwell, I thought—that—you were engaged?" she answered, falteringly.

"Never. That was only rumor, darling. Look up and say you will be mine alone!"

"Yours alone!" answered the sweet, low, trustful tones, and Harold Farwell pressed a long kiss upon the lips of his betrothed.

"I am going home next week to remain a month," said he, as they approached Miss Dutton's abode. "It is now about a year since I came away, and I shall indulge in a short vacation. This is the happiest night of my life, and you have made it so. Do you know that I knew of you before I came to Merton?"

"No, indeed! How could you hear of me, pray?" answered she, wonderingly.

"O, my friend Mr. Leigh, who came with me had heard of your sterling worth. He had seen you when he was here before, and he charged me not to lose my heart; but I did not obey his charges, and I don't think he will be very much displeased with his old chum for not doing so."

"Auntie and I are going on a journey to-morrow morning, if nothing prevents. I am intending to visit my old home for a few weeks, and auntie is going very much further, to visit some relatives of hers."

"Indeed! then I shall pass through Deerfield on my way home. I wish you would go with me as my wife, dearest Florrie!" said he, suddenly and earnestly.

"No, no! I cannot! Why, auntie doesn't even know of our engagement! She will not, cannot lose me so soon, poor dear auntie!" And she was wiping away the tears that would come at the thought of leaving lonely Aunt Charity in her still home.

That good lady was both astonished and delighted when her niece told her all, kneeling beside her that evening. Of Dr. Farwell's proposal to be married ere his departure she said naught, for auntie was crying now to think of their inevitable separation. All the brightly glowing dreams of her girlhood came up before her, and the loving words to which she had listened so trustingly in the sweet long ago, and which bright things had turned to cold deadness and blackness, as far as the love for one mortal above all others was concerned.

Next morning the old stagecoach stopped at the door for its two passengers, and Florrie left Merton far behind, and saw the green fields and wooded hills of her own dear country home, where she had roamed in childhood with her beloved sister, now gone to a home of her own. Auntie bade her farewell, giving her many charges and messages, bidding her be ready to return when she called for her on her way back.

How blissfully the time passed! How glad she was to meet all the kind friends she remembered so well, and who loved her so dearly! They could not feel envious toward the fair girl who showed by voice, manner, dress and conversation that she had been accustomed to better society and more refinement than they or their daughters. She was so gentle, and modest, and unaffected, they could not help admiring and loving her!

Clasped close to her mother's breast, she told her of her engagement to the doctor, and received her kindly expressions of love and interest in all that pertained to her daughter's happiness and welfare.

The next week the worthy inhabitants of Deerfield were astonished to see the doctor's conveyance at John Wyman's door, and its tall occupant knocking thereat. Soon it was known throughout the village that Floy Wyman's beau had come, and great was the excitement consequent upon the event.

Dr. Farwell introduced himself to Mr. and Mrs. Wyman, and quite won their hearts by his agreeable manner. Florrie was visiting at the minister's house not far away, and on his inquiring for her, they directed him thither. The good pastor and his worthy helpmeet were no strangers to Harold Farwell, who had met them in Danbury, and they were delighted to meet him, especially as they knew of the relation existing between him and their beloved Florrie.

As the loving pair, radiant with joy at meeting each other again, sat in the minister's little parlor alone, the doctor said:

"It is my wish that we be married before I go any further; I am anxious to take my bride home with me to my mother's house when I return. Say, will you go?"

Florrie, with her head on her shoulder, looked up quickly and answered:

"Harold, I cannot go now; auntie would be so displeased, and really I cannot!"

"Florrie, who has the most right to hinder your going, your grand-aunt or your father and mother? Surely, if they are not opposed to so speedy a marriage, you need not fear her displeasure. If they are willing, will you consent?"

"But you know Aunt Charity has done everything for me, and treated me as if I were her daughter. Indeed, you really must not urge me to such a step, for I positively cannot consent!" And she spoke in tones of real distress, while her cheeks glowed and her eyes filled with tears!

"Promise me you will be mine at once, if your parents consent, Florrie darling!" said he, persistently.

"Well, then I promise, for I am certain they will never agree to it," answered Florrie, firmly.

Next morning she was in her mother's chamber bright and early, beseeching her not to listen to the doctor's proposal, should

he mention it to her. "Father is so easy and pliable, I know he would say nothing against it; but, mother, I entreat you to be firmly opposed to it, for you know how auntie would feel! I know she would want me to be married at her house, and I cannot consent, even if I lose Harold's love! Say, mother dear, you never will be willing!"

"I never will be willing!" And Florrie went out and waited for the doctor's coming with a relieved heart.

So, though he pleaded and remonstrated with the determined mother, she was immovable, and the young man was compelled to go homeward alone, leaving it to the pleasure of Aunt Charity as to when the wedding should take place.

The weeks of Florrie's stay in the country sped quickly away, as likewise those of the doctor's visit; and the little dwelling in Merton was alive again with Miss Dutton's shrill voice and Florrie's musical laughter. Dr. Farwell returned the very next day, and his pony and carriage might often have been seen at the good lady's door; for a most earnest courtship had begun, which was to end in a gay wedding at the beginning of the New Year. Auntie was well pleased to find that her niece would not leave her as suddenly as the doctor wished, and determined to give her an elegant outfit, and a grand supper on the bridal night.

And what of the stately Christine, and her statelier mother meanwhile? Mrs. Truman could not believe her own ears when she heard that the doctor had chosen Florrie, in preference to her daughter.

"If he could only know as much about the Wymans as I do, he never would have chosen a wife from among them!" she said to her lady friends. "After we have treated him as a son, and done so much for him, it shows his character as not being much of a gentleman to requite us so. And Christine liked him so! It's a real shame!" And she was fairly ill, and kept her room for a fortnight afterward, while Christine went around the house like an injured heroine of romance, white, silent and lofty.

Georgie laughed, and played, and sang, to cheer the evil spirit away, but had to bear many a javelin thrust which she could not escape.

But a cordial came for the damsel's

grief in the shape of a young college chum of the delinquent doctor, one of the same profession, who was sent for by the said doctor to take his place in Danbury during his absence. Charles Truman soon became intimate with the young man, and invited him to the paternal mansion, where he made himself quite at home, and seemed more likely to be smitten with the charms of the graceful Christine than his worthy chum Farwell. Could you believe that a wounded heart, and one which had been so terribly lacerated as hers had been, could heal so easily and so rapidly? Yet so it was; for ere a month had elapsed Dr. Raymond and Christine Truman were engaged, with the gracious consent of the heads of the family, despite the fact of his being a stranger to them and every one else. Georgie wondered at her sister's infatuation, and remonstrated with her, but Chrissie was proof against shafts of sisterly advice.

"You don't know who he may be; some reckless good-for-nothing fellow, who may soon cease to care for you, if, indeed, he does have any affection for you now. And they say he is a terrible flirt among the young ladies of Danbury."

"Well, I'm sure no one knew anything of Dr. Farwell's antecedents or previous character. Who knows but what he may be some worthless adventurer? I'm sure, every one was ready to devour him, and even the saintly Charity Dutton was delighted to think he wanted Florrie."

"O Chrissie! there were several in Danbury who knew Dr. Farwell's family, and that he was a worthy young man; and his conduct during the time he has been there proves him to be a most estimable person. But I don't like Dr. Raymond's looks and manners, and I can't think of having him for a brother-in-law. Why, sister dear, how can you think of going away with an entire stranger, and leaving your family, when we are all so comfortable and happy here together?"

"Georgie, do be still! I'm not afraid to trust Gerald, for I know he loves me; and you need not scold me for wanting to go away and see the world. I'm certain if all were as smooth as it might be, you would marry Guy Newton to-morrow, and leave your home."

Georgie blushed, and answered, quietly:

"I think Guy Newton a different person

altogether from Gerald Raymond, or I never would marry him."

"Well, I shall marry Gerald, anyway! It may not be very soon, for he must get his practice established somewhere before we get married. But I shall show the world that I can make as good a doctor's wife as Flo Wyman!" And the thin red lips set themselves firmly together.

The time came for her lover's departure, and with many vows of eternal constancy, and expressions of tenderest affection, and promises to write very, very often until the time should come for him to return and claim her as his own, Gerald Raymond parted from his sobbing Christine, and sailed away, accompanied by young Truman, who was going to college in charge of the doctor.

Christine would not call upon Miss Wyman when she returned from Deerfield, though Georgina was as kind and loving as ever to her friend, in whose good fortune she rejoiced. Dear unselfish Georgie! How affectionate she was, and how thoughtful of others! She never sat down and brooded over her trials and difficulties, but aimed at being a blessing to those around her, and living for something beside herself.

The bridal night drew near, and Aunt Charity was in such a flurry! You would have thought she was the one who contemplated marriage, instead of the calm quietly-moving Florrie, who was so undisturbed and collected in her various employments. And when the time arrived, and loving hands arrayed her in her bridal dress of simple muslin, and arranged the misty veil, and placed the orange wreath upon her pure brow, was there ever so sweet and lovely a bride in all Merton before?

Poor Miss Charity made odd faces while trying to keep back the tears as she bustled around the rooms, up stairs and down, as if scarcely knowing what she was doing. Everything she could do had been done by her for her loving niece, and beneath all grief at the thought of losing her pleasant companionship, she felt complacent and satisfied, knowing that a loving and noble heart would henceforth have Florrie in its keeping.

Georgie Truman was the bridesmaid, and Guy Newton was the doctor's attendant; and both were joyous and smiling. Ere

they went down to the drawing-room, where the numerous guests were gathering, Guy whispered to the radiant Georgie, who was fluttering about in her white robes:

"Do you know we will be married to-night, darling?"

"Married to-night! nonsense, Guy!" And the little black-haired damsel looked as if she thought her lover had lost his senses.

"I am in earnest, Georgie," said he; and he drew her to the window recess. "My house is all ready. Mother and the girls know about it. I've been planning it ever since I knew you were to be Florrie's bridesmaid, and I the groomsman. Your father is perfectly willing, and it will be such a surprise to every one! The doctor and Florrie do not imagine such a thing."

Bewildered Georgie felt as if in a dream, and could scarcely speak.

"Don't look so amazed, darling. Get on your laughing face again. I haven't told you anything so very dreadful, have I?"

"It is so sudden and unexpected," murmured Georgie, "I cannot realize it at all!"

"Compose yourself, dearest!" he whispered; when Aunt Charity came up to inform them that the time for the ceremony had fully come, and the guests were evincing signs of impatience.

All eyes were riveted to the bridal party as they came in and took their places before the clergyman, who only, beside the father of the trembling yet calm little maiden, knew of the double marriage about to be solemnized. The knot was speedily tied between the tall doctor and the fair Florrie, and, ere time was afforded for congratulations, the clergyman proceeded forthwith to join Mr. Guy Newton and Miss Georgina Truman in the holy bands of matrimony, to the great surprise of every one present.

"Did you know it, Mr. Truman?" every one asked of the smiling *paterfamilias*, who had accepted the invitation to the wedding, but whose indignant spouse refused to grace the occasion with her presence.

"Of course I did! and I'm glad of it, too!" answered he, as he made his way towards the newly-married couples to offer his congratulatory expressions.

"Such a novel wedding!" every one said. And all passed off so smoothly, too! Rarely were there two such lovely brides;

and if Guy Newton was not as tall and distinguished as the stately Dr. Farwell, he was good and true-looking, and Georgie was proud of him, and was so happy and lovely that every one admired her quite as much as they did Florrie.

At last quiet came again to the abode of Charity Dutton, and the lonely lady shed many tears at the parting hour, and groaned to think of the weary hours she must pass without the society of her dear Florrie, who had gone to her Danbury home to be a radiant sunbeam in the dwelling of her devoted and beloved husband.

The weeks rolled by, and Christine Truman had heard not a word from her absent lover who had promised so faithfully to write to her while away. Young Truman had written often, always mentioning that he had not seen Dr. Raymond, or heard a word from him since he parted with him at the hotel, on his arrival in the city. Christine's pride was much wounded at the thought of being deserted in that way, but she resolved that no one should know the feelings of her heart by her appearance or words. So, as the time passed on, and no tidings came from the recreant doctor, she grew statelier, and loftier, and paler, and that was all the difference any one could perceive in her; though it began to be whispered among her friends and acquaintances that she would see or hear no more of Gerald Raymond. Mrs. Truman was remarkably quiet on the subject; indeed, she thought it best to be reticent with regard to it, which was certainly the best course for her to take.

"Harold," said the doctor's wife to her husband one day, as they were sitting in the little dining-room, he busily writing, and she working away with her crochet-needle, "did you know that Gerald Raymond was engaged to Christine Truman?"

"Why, yes, dear?" answered the doctor, looking up from his writing. "Did I never tell you about it? I got a letter from him about a fortnight ago, in which he confessed his pranks and misdemeanors while filling my place in Danbury. He confesses to having entered into an engagement with several young ladies here, and mentions Christine Truman as being a 'pretty proud little girl, and hopes she is not heart-broken!'"

"The wretched, worthless flirt! How

can he act so? Do you know I found a letter one day that must have dropped from his pocket while here? 'Twas from a young lady in New York to whom he was evidently engaged, in which she upbraided him for not having informed her of his whereabouts ere that time, and in which she desired to know if he still cared for her, and also assured him of her changeless love for him. Poor Christine! I do really pity her. I suppose she felt sure of getting a doctor when he came along, if she did lose the chance of getting you." And Florrie laughed a low musical laugh.

"It's a good thing she never married him, dear. I know all about him and his family; and Miss Truman is one of those persons who will not give way to grief, and make herself ridiculous. She has too much pride and love for herself to do that."

Christine did, nevertheless, grieve in secret over her broken idols; and there was no Georgie near her to bring the smiles back to her face, and her irascible mamma was not very expert at cheering one up. So she grew thin, and mopish, and reserved at home, though in company she endeavored to appear to as good advantage as possible, for was not her younger sister married, and she loverless?

She was sitting by the front window of her sister's home one pleasant afternoon, gazing out on the passers-by, when her attention was attracted to a young man who was entering a store opposite. He was about the medium height, slender and graceful in movement and air. His hair was glossy black, as well as his whiskers and trim mustache. Glittering studs adorned his wrists and immaculate shirt-front, and he had the most charming white teeth; so she perceived as he turned to speak to a person near the door.

"Who can that be?" she said to Georgie, who just then came into the room.

"Why, Christ! you haven't lost your heart again?" laughed Georgie; then added, soberly, "I've never said scarcely anything to you about Dr. Raymond, knowing your feelings, but I am glad you never married him, sister. He did turn out to be a worthless vagabond, as I told you I felt sure he would, though I knew nothing of him."

Chrissie turned very pale, and looked out of the window again.

"Well, I really am anxious to know who that stranger is. I'm certain he's a perfect gentleman, just by the looks of him; and one doesn't see many gentlemen nowadays, in Merton, especially!" And Christine strained her eyes to see if she could make out the form of the graceful unknown among the crowd that thronged the store. Presently he came out and passed the window, looking up with a surprised glance of admiration at the fair face which grew rosy in an instant, and withdrew behind the curtain.

The stranger was a dentist, a Dr. Wayne, from Germany, it was said. He had opened an office not far from Mr. Newton's, and intended remaining in Merton for some time. The young ladies of the village quite lionized the new-comer, and Christine Truman was not behind the others in gaining the smiles and compliments of the slender gentleman. Mrs. Truman welcomed him to her parlors when she gave a party, and was all smiling and entertaining, for did not her ancestors come from Germany? So she talked, and scarcely gave him an opportunity of casting a sly glance of admiration towards Miss Christine, who sat quite prepared for a flirtation, having on her most languishing air, and her most becoming attire.

Now certain very discreditable rumors began to be afloat concerning this same Dr. Wayne, and he fell into disfavor with the belles of Merton, with the exception of Miss Truman, who stood up for him valiantly whenever his character was assailed, to the intense amusement of her feminine friends.

Chrissie had a certain old bachelor uncle, whom we have never mentioned before, who was the owner of a marvellous structure, yecept a dwelling-house whose wings, and turrets, and balconies were the wonder of all Merton. Now said uncle had had his ears saluted with the news that Dr. Wayne had remarked that "'twas quite likely that Mr. Aaron Truman would leave his house and property to his niece Christine, as there was no danger of his ever occupying it himself." This remark savored quite strongly—to Mr. Aaron—of a penniless adventurer desirous of marrying for money; and he sounded his brother with regard to his prospective son-in-law, receiving his expression of strong antipathy towards the dandified dentist with supreme satisfaction.

"He shall never have my consent to marry Christine, that I am determined upon!" said the old gentleman. "I don't care if the women do talk, and cry, and scold, and stay in their rooms a month! I was fooled once, and I'll see if I'll be again!" And Aaron winked and nodded approvingly at his brother's decision.

So one evening—the occasion of a grand tea-meeting in Merton—when Mr. Truman saw his daughter leave the hall for a walk, in company with the dentist, his wrath suddenly began to rise alarmingly, and he hastened to his domicile, that, like Tam O'Shanter's spouse, he might "nurse his wrath to keep it warm." His worthy wife had disappeared, so he sat down, and, giving the fire a vigorous poking, awaited the coming of his eldest daughter, whose conduct had so displeased him. Surely he heard voices at the gate, he thought, after waiting at least two hours. He would stop their conversation pretty quickly; and the door was flung open, and a thundering voice exclaimed:

"Christine Truman, come into the house!"

The startled damsel obeyed her father's peremptory summons immediately, leaving the object of her affections in a somewhat alarmed state of mind, as he hastened down the street. She walked in slowly, and entered the parlor, where her paternal relative was seated upright in his chair, as if fixed with some desperate resolve.

"Christine, were you walking with that Wayne this evening?"

"Yes sir," she answered quietly, as she seated herself on the sofa, and unpinned her shawl, letting it fall round her graceful form, while her cheeks burned and glowed. "What objections do you have to my walking with the young gentleman, father?"

"I don't want my daughter to be seen in the company of that young scoundrel, and I positively forbid your doing so again. Do you hear me, and will you obey me?"

He rose and stood before the trembling girl, and looked straight into her large eyes, which fixed themselves steadily on his face as she replied, coolly and calmly:

"I am engaged to that young scoundrel, as you term him, father, and I consider myself capable by this time of judging who is a fit companion for me; so I don't wish to hear anything more on that subject!"

And she rose, opened the door, and went out and up to her chamber, leaving the astonished "parient" staring wildly after his retreating daughter, and wondering if she were demented.

At last he found his voice, and going out into the hall, called after her:

"If you marry that fellow you need never darken my doors again. But you never shall marry him!"

In spite of the expression of paternal indignation which startled Christine, she contrived to meet the elegant doctor next day, and informed him of what had taken place.

"I am going to remove to Danbury soon. We will keep quiet until I am gone, then I will write and tell you of my plans. O, if we could but make our escape to my native land!" sighed the lovelorn swain. And Chrissie thought how very romantic it would be.

"Where were you yesterday, sister?" asked Mrs. Newton of Christine, one Monday afternoon, when she was paying her a short visit.

"O, mamma and I went to Danbury to attend divine service at the Episcopal church. Didn't you see us? We were not far ahead of you as you came down the street."

"Now, Chrissie, tell me what you went there for. Was it not to meet a certain perfumed and bewhiskered arrangement who calls himself a doctor, but who, I believe, is no more a doctor than I am. Are you crazy, Christine Truman?"

"Not a bit, Georgina Newton! It's very strange that you don't consider your elder sister competent to decide for herself."

"You are so blind, Christine! I don't know what will become of you, I'm sure!"

"Pray attend to your own affairs, and, like a good sister, don't interfere with mine!" was Christine's answer.

"Mamma!" exclaimed little Jane Truman, running down to the dining-room one morning, about three or four weeks after the conversation between the sisters, "I can't find Christine anywhere. She isn't in the closet, and she isn't up garret; and I guess a big giant must have come and carried her off, like the girl in my new story-book."

The heads of the family having become a little alarmed at the non-appearance of their daughter at the breakfast-table, had

sent little Jane to call her sister; and now her announcement filled them with wonder and fear. The house was searched from top to bottom, but no Christine could be found. Her wardrobe had vanished likewise, and all her choicest belongings. A tiny note was found on her toilet by little Jane, addressed to her mother, in which she declared that "she meant to elope with her lover, as her father was so determined against the match. Perhaps at some future time, if he were willing, she would darken his doors; though now she was about to start for a far-distant land with the man who, in a few hours, would be her husband, and in whom she placed the fullest confidence."

Poor Mrs. Truman was quite upset by this sudden event. She bitterly upbraided her husband as the cause of it, telling him that by his harshness he had driven his child from her home and family. But he was inexorable, and even avowed his intention of not going in search of Christine, though her mother entreated, and scolded, and stormed.

"I shall have nothing more to do with her; let her alone."

So our heroine, who had made her escape in the darkness of the night, assisted by her gallant lover, was allowed to depart from her native shores as Mrs. Dr. Wayne,

going somewhere, she scarcely knew whither.

When the young Dr. Truman came back to his home, in the full glory of a most marvellously high shirt collar, and a prodigious amount of blue and white necktie; hair still white, and lean face still whiskerless, though there were the slightest possible suspicions of a faint mustache promising to be quite invisible, and air and manner reminding one of one's grandfather, he found his stately sister had, in her extreme fondness for the title M. D., gone off with an unknown adventurer, no one knew whither.

Years afterward, when Christine had learned by bitter experience that fair promises and fine appearances are not to be always implicitly trusted, when the proud spirit had been tamed by the rough usage of this world, and the garb of widowhood clothed her bowed form, she came back, sorrowful and saddened, to her aged parents and still loving sisters, who, rejoicing over the returned wanderer, sought to make her life a happy one; and in the quiet noon of middle life she found a true, manly and noble heart willing to help her over the thorny ways of earth, and of whose worthiness she strove, by her unselfishness and by earnest strivings after a better life, to make herself worthy.

- WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I WILL BRAVE HIS ANGER."

"LADY VALENCE, I will be frank with you," continued Dr. Newall. "I cannot deny that your husband is ill, and that his illness has been to me a very mysterious and inexplicable thing—until to-day. Mentally, he is very ill; but I do not say he is incurable."

"Thank God! O thank God!"

"Still, his disease has so much more to do with the mind than the body, that ordinary means will, I am afraid, be of little avail. The plain fact is, that Lord Valence has unhinged his own mind. From a child he has been of a sensitive and emotional temperament; and this disposition, which should have been combated in every possible way, through the means of healthy interests and exercise, he has fatally encouraged by the nature of his studies."

"Do you mean to say he has brought this state of things on himself?"

"Entirely so. As would any one who gave himself up, body and soul, to the unravelling of mysteries, which, if even the Divine law intended at any period to be made more clear to us, it never meant that in their pursuit we should neglect the higher human duties to which we were born into the world."

"Dr. Newall! you speak as though you believed it all."

"Believed what, my dear lady?"

"That it really is possible to hold communication with the unseen world. I know," continues Everil, rather unsteadily, "that I began by telling you that I had seen the—the spirit; but I thought—I hoped—that is, I fancied—"

"That I could contradict your statement, and tell you that it was all nonsense—the effect of your heated imagination. No! Lady Valence, I can't do that! I do not know, of course, in this case whether it was fancy or not. Your nerves may have been—doubtless were—worked up to the highest pitch, and have raised a phantom of themselves to frighten you."

"O no! indeed they did not. I know

now—I feel sure—that I was not mistaken—that it really was there. Yet—"

"Yet—you are surprised that I believe you. My dear child, this is nothing new to me, or to any one. What you have experienced is as old as the hills."

"Then you think that all the stories of ghosts that one has heard are true?"

"Certainly not. Not one in a hundred is true; but do you suppose such stories would ever gain ground without some foundation? From the earliest ages, Lady Valence, man has at times attempted to raise the veil that hangs between us and the unseen world, and to peer into those mysteries which for some wise purpose have been hidden from ordinary sight, and he has generally suffered for it."

"Is it wicked?" demands Everil, in a low voice.

"It is not for me to say whether it is wicked or not, Lady Valence. The Catholic church, the church to which I belong, has decided that her children had better not meddle with it; consequently I have no personal experience of its effects on the human mind. But I have, unfortunately, been called on more than once during my professional career to cure a patient whose bodily health has been wrecked by the unnatural strain upon his mind caused by this unnatural study."

"I have heard of spiritualism, of course, on occasions," says Everil; "but I never took any interest in it, and I little thought it could be productive of such awful results as these."

"No more it is in ordinary cases; but your husband's is not an ordinary case. From a child he has been unusually subject to such influences. I remember when his dear father died, and I went to announce the fact to him, he met me at the door with the intelligence that he was not dead, and that he had but just seen him standing in his room. I can see his boyish face now, lighted up, almost as it were ethereally with the conviction. I tried to combat the idea. I hoped then it might have been his imagination; but I soon saw I was mistaken. He has never been like

other boys or men since that night." "Tell me all about him," says Everil, imploringly.

"He grew too slight and delicate; too fond of solitude and study; too silent and reserved in company. There was no bodily disease apparent, excepting that his pulse was higher and more fitful than was suited to his age, and that he occasionally suffered from slight attacks of fever. Then he went abroad, and for some years I lost sight of him."

"Did he see these—these things then, Dr. Newall?"

"I cannot tell your ladyship; but I fancy not. I think it must have been whilst abroad that he was first imbued with a desire to turn his study of necromancy to account. When he returned I saw a great alteration in him. I ventured once or twice to speak to him on the subject; but he did not encourage me to renew the attempt."

"O, why were you not brave? You should have risked his anger—anything—to save him from himself."

"My dear lady, remember that my duty extends no further than looking after Lord Valence's body. With his mind, his thoughts, his inner self, I have no right to meddle. It is you alone, who are one with him, who have the privilege to search his soul."

"And I have found it out too late—too late!"

"We will not say that yet," replies the old doctor, kindly; but she observes that he does not say it hopefully; "though you have not found it out one day too soon. I knew then that your husband pursued this study more than was good for him, and I saw his health gradually give way; yet I was at a loss to link the two facts together, which, as I observed before, under ordinary circumstances, would have had no connection. But what you have told me to-day makes it all clear to me. If Lord Valence has permitted his curiosity to go to such lengths as you describe, and his mind to believe all the so-called revelations made to him, it is no wonder his health has sunk beneath the torture. Lady Valence, I have told you all I know. Be equally frank with me, or we may lose the last chance of disabusing your husband's mind of this terrible superstition."

"I will tell you everything, Dr. Newall;

but remember my knowledge only dates from last night. Valence has always told me that his premature death was certain, and nothing could prevent it; and yesterday he said the very day and hour were fixed. Then it came—O, what a fool I was to faint; but I never believed that it could be really true. He called it *Isola*, and I remember nothing more. But when I recovered, and questioned him, and implored him to tell me the whole truth, he said that it had told him that he should"—faltering—"that he should"—stopping short.

"Yes, yes, my dear child, I understand," says Dr. Newall, soothingly.

"Next February—on the 3d—at noon," concludes Lady Valence in a despairing whisper.

"And the poor boy—with a power of emotion that wears out his nature as a sword does its scabbard—is so thoroughly impressed with the idea that what he has heard is true, that the flame of existence flickers down lower every day, and threatens to go out at the appointed time from sheer belief in the impossibility of its lasting longer. And what a life it is to be thus thrown away!"

His words ring in her ears as if they were a death knell. She rises suddenly from her seat, and throws herself at his feet.

"O no!—O no! Don't say that, Dr. Newall! for Heaven's sake, don't say that! You will save him, will you not—now that you know all? You will think of some means by which we may save him from the effects of his own weakness. I know it is nothing, and I cannot say what I want to say; but if my life—my fortune—if I could work—if I could die—O my God! I am talking such folly, when I want to say so much!"

"Poor child! And do you really love him like this?"

She is sobbing so violently that at first she cannot answer him, but as the feeling of the kind old hand that is laid upon her bowed head soothes her into peace, she makes her humble confession to him, still on her knees.

"I did not once. The conditions of my father's will that brought us together were repugnant to me. They roused my worst feelings, and I almost hated him. But since we have been man and wife—since I have lived with him, and seen how good, and honorable, and kind he is, and what a

world of tender feeling lies hid beneath his gentle nature, I have learned"—in a lower tone—"not to love, I think, but to—worship him."

"God reward your goodness to him, my child, tenfold into your bosom. And whatever happens—whether the worst we fear comes to pass, or you are spared to spend your lives together—the remembrance of this time, and the strength that has been given you to overcome your pride and acknowledge that you have been in the wrong, will remain to comfort you to the very end."

She has regained her calmness by this time, and she rises and takes a seat opposite to him with only a trace of sadness on her features.

"But what am I to do, Dr. Newall?" she says, after a pause. "What can we do, in order, if possible, to avert this awful calamity?"

"I am not prepared all at once to tell you that, Lady Valence. With this new knowledge in my mind, I must watch the earl narrowly for the next few days, and see what effect the warning has had upon his general health. It has appeared to me better of late. I hoped it was mending."

"So did I. And if you could only have seen him this morning! He looked so young and cheerful as he bade me good-by. No one but myself could believe the horrors he went through last night. But Mrs. West, who has been his companion throughout this fatal study, tells every one that he is dying. And he believes it. And—"

"Lady Valence, excuse me for interrupting you, but I have made up my mind on the matter. I will speak to the earl myself. No! do not be afraid. I shall not mention that I have seen you; but I will lead him on to speak about his general health until I draw the real truth from him."

"But will he not be angry with you? Agatha has told me he will not permit his most intimate friends to approach the subject."

"I will brave his anger, for your sake and his own. At the worst, he can but disbelieve me, and my arguments if convincing, may turn his thoughts into another direction. Meanwhile, Lady Valence, the one thing needful is to divert his mind. Don't mention spiritualism to him in any way—don't even allude to it; but engage

him in lively conversation and pursuits, and draw him out of himself."

"Ah! that is easier said than done. You don't know the difficulties of what you propose. In this gloomy old castle, too, of which every nook and corner is associated in his memory with some spectral illusion. He is not free from them even in his own chamber. His world is peopled with unnatural creations. He lives in an atmosphere of mystery."

"Take him away from Castle Valence, then."

"Where? Abroad? Do you think he would come?"

"Why not make the attempt? Ask him to go—for your sake."

She claps her hands together. A red glow of hope suffuses her cheek.

"Perhaps he would! And when we are far away from all that can recall the past to him—he and I, together and alone—I shall have courage, perhaps, to speak openly and do combat with his fears to convince him that it is imagination. But no! no!" she continues, shrinking back, as the thought of what she saw in the library the night before comes back upon her mind. "How can I say that when I know it to be real—so real?"

"The apparition may be real, Lady Valence. It is no reason that its prophecy should be real also. The line of argument I should wish you to adopt with your husband is, not that his sense of sight has deceived him, but his sense of reasoning."

"I see—I understand," she says, rising. "Dr. Newall, how can I thank you sufficiently! You have given me hope. It is but a glimmer, but it is hope."

"Your ladyship has given me more than hope," he answers, cheerily. "You have given me the certain assurance that my dear friend's son has at last some one to care for and look after him. Lady Valence, I never liked Mrs. West. I may be unjust in my conclusions, but I do not think Mrs. West is to be trusted."

"No more do I, Dr. Newall; but Agatha is one of Valence's infatuations. He believes she is devoted to his interests, and she takes good care to keep him up to the belief."

"Get rid of Mrs. West as soon as you conveniently can," remarks the doctor quietly—so quietly that he makes Everil laugh.

"She tells Valence that somebody intends to relieve me of the trouble, Dr. Newall."

"The sooner the better. Come Lady Valence, that is something like a face to take back to the castle. I never saw you look so happy, nor—if you will allow me to say it—so beautiful before."

"I am going back to him!" she answers brightly, as she leaves him to ponder over the intelligence he has received.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MY HONOR—AS A GENTLEMAN."

NATURALLY it occupies his mind for the remainder of the day, though he is not so much puzzled by it as most men might have been.

Dr. Newall has been bred up in the Catholic faith, and miracles are no subjects of incredulity with him. He knows that they have occurred from the beginning of time. He believes they will continue to the end, and he is not prepared to argue when they should or should not be revealed to men. But none the less is he able to see how fatal a power that of communication with the unseen world would prove in the hands of most mortals, nor how the man must suffer who resigns his will and reason to those of spirits in nowise better fitted to guide him than his own, except for the fact that they have been unclothed from the flesh with which he is still encumbered. He is so troubled on the matter that he cannot rest, and, having left his early dinner untasted on the table, strolls towards the castle in hopes of finding Lord Valence at home. On his way he encounters Mrs. West.

"Well, Mrs. West, how is the little man going on? Famously, eh! I thought we shouldn't make a long job of it. But you must be careful not to let him get out of doors too soon. It is treacherous weather for taking cold."

"O no, Dr. Newall. I should be careful of any one in such a case; but with Arthur, whose life is so especially precious!"

"O!—ah!—yes! an only child, of course. They're always spoiled. But you'll marry again some day, Mrs. West, and make up your baker's dozen."

She alluded to her child's chance of inheriting the earldom, and Dr. Newall knows as well as possible that she intended

him to understand it so; but he will not flatter her ambitious hopes.

"Even if I do," replies the widow, not entirely displeased with the supposition, "I don't see how it will make any difference to my dear Arthur's prospects. How ill poor Valence is looking, doctor!"

A notion comes into the doctor's head. He will question this shifty little woman and try to bring her to book before he sees the earl, so that he may have some foundation on which to rest his sudden determination to trace the cause of his indisposition to the root.

"Very ill, Mrs. West; and I have had reason to think lately there is some ulterior cause for his illness, which has not yet been disclosed to me, and without discovering which my medicines will continue to be of no avail. Now, I think you can help me in the matter. You are the earl's constant companion, I may say his most intimate friend. You have assisted him also, if I guess rightly, in the pursuit of this study of necromancy, to which he is so much addicted. Now, tell me the truth. How far does he permit it to affect his daily life?"

How quickly the wind changes. It may be blowing in your face one moment, and apparently, without rhyme or reason, you find it against your back the next. Mrs. West's tactics are like the wind. She commenced the conversation with the idea of hearing Dr. Newall reiterate his former statements that Lord Valence's symptoms are such a puzzle to him that his disease must take its chance; in which case she would have confirmed his suspicions, and lamented with him the sad prospect of their mutual bereavement; but directly she hears his appeal to her to disclose all she may know of Valence's private studies, and the effect they have produced on his mind and body, she scents danger and disappointment in the distance, and is ignorant itself upon the subject.

"Necromancy, doctor? What an awful term! Do you mean spiritualism? Just sitting at a table, and all that kind of nonsense?"

"No, Mrs. West. I don't mean any kind of nonsense. I mean this study which is affecting Lord Valence's brain, and may be productive of the most fatal consequences to his health. Do you not pursue it with him?"

"Do I not, what is called 'sit' with him, you mean. O, sometimes."

"How often do you call 'sometimes'? Every day?"

"O now, Dr. Newall, how do you suppose I could attend to my darling child, and to dear Valence himself, for that matter, if I were always playing at turning tables? No, of course not."

"Every other day, perhaps?"

"I really couldn't say. I go when dear Valence asks me, just to please him, you know, for an hour or so after the rest have gone to bed."

"And what occurs at these sittings? Please be frank with me, madam. Your brother-in-law's life may depend upon your answers."

How well she knows it!

"I wish you wouldn't talk in that horribly solemn way, doctor; you make one feel so nervous. Besides what have our little *seances* to do with dear Valence's health?"

"Everything, as I imagine."

"O doctor! What, just watching a table turn round, or hearing it rap? How could that hurt anybody? I am sure I would never sit again if I thought so. I should be afraid of it for myself."

"Do you mean to tell me, that after so many years of patient investigation on the part of Lord Valence and yourself, Mrs. West, nothing more occurs at these *seances* than you have already mentioned? No sounds or touches—no appearances?"

"No *ghosts*, do you mean? Goodness, doctor! *no!* Do you suppose I should be alive to speak to you about them if there had been *appearances*? Good heavens! how you make me creep! I feel as if I should never be warm again."

"Then what are these faints or fits—these lengthened periods of unconsciousness, which I understand Lord Valence suffers from?"

He looks at her sternly, and Agatha does not quite know what to answer. If she denies all knowledge of the earl's trances she may be convicted of falsehood, for Valence may have mentioned them himself to the doctor, or the servants may have been bold enough to carry the report to him. Agatha seldom finds herself in a quandary, but she is in one now. Yet catlike, she shuffles out of it, though tamely.

"O, his faints, you mean. People foam at the mouth, don't they, when they have

fits? Besides, I know these are faints. I have often fainted myself. There is not much danger in fainting, is there?"

"The question now is, not what is dangerous, or what is not, but how far has this disease gone. Why have I not been informed of Lord Valence's fainting? You have seen me constantly, Mrs. West, and have discussed this subject almost as often as we have met. Why have you never directed my attention to this phase of his illness?"

"I really did not think it was of sufficient consequence."

"Does it occur often?"

"O dear, no!—only occasionally. When he is over-fatigued, I suppose. You will allow that I have never denied that he is very weak, Dr. Newall."

"How long do the attacks last?"

"Not very long. They are ordinary fainting fits."

"Yet a rumor has reached me of his having had one that lasted above an hour, Mrs. West."

She colors at this.

"Ah! that was an exceptional occasion; and I should have sent for you then, of course, Dr. Newall, if it had been in the day, but it took place at night."

"You might have told me of it afterwards."

"Well, perhaps I should; but poor dear Valence is very sensitive, you know, and most averse to the subject of his health being commented on. He would not be pleased to hear that we ever discussed it together."

"He must hear it without being pleased, then," answers the doctor, roughly, "for I am determined to sift this matter to the bottom. Is the earl within doors?"

"I think so; I am not sure. But O Dr. Newall," continues Agatha, with real alarm, "I hope you will confine your inquiries entirely to his bodily health, and not mention a word about spiritualism. He will never forgive you if you do."

"I shall act for the best, madam, and say and do exactly as occasion requires, without any reference to Lord Valence's feelings. The business has gone too far for that now."

"But it is matter of so entirely private a nature, doctor. I don't think any friend, however intimate, has a right to pry into the secrets of another's breast."

"I hope I have always proved myself a friend of Lord Valence, Mrs. West; but in this instance, I go to him purely in the character of his medical adviser."

"But you will startle him; you will shock his sense of delicacy if you dash at once into a subject which he has considered a profound secret. Let me go to Valence first, doctor. Let me prepare him."

"By no means!" says the doctor, as firmly but gently he puts her on one side. "I do not need your assistance, Mrs. West. I wish to see Lord Valence by himself; and if he is not at home when I call, I shall wait until he returns." And so saying, he leaves the little widow very ill at ease, and puzzled to conjecture what can possibly be the issue of the coming venture. Will Valence be so weak as to disclose all; and if he so discloses it, will Dr. Newall have the power to laugh him out of his belief, or convince him of its fallacy? Who can have aroused the doctor's suspicions?

As this question presents itself to her mind, a sudden look of intelligence—of disappointment—of fear, passes over her features. She would run after the doctor, and at all risks forestall the communication he is likely to receive, so as to infuse a little of her own coloring to the facts which must inevitably startle him into further inquiry; but he is already past the possibility of being overtaken. Even as she looks round for him, she sees him disappearing within the castle walls; and she has no better companions than her conjectures and her fears for the remainder of her walk.

* * * * *

When Lord Valence hears that Doctor Newall is waiting to see him, he comes bounding into the library as if he were a boy.

"How are you, Newall? Splendid day, isn't it? I've just come back from Ballyboegan. Have you seen Lady Valence? I left her not a minute ago, tossing my poor old books hither and thither, and transforming all my bachelor neatness into exquisite confusion."

He seats himself on the edge of a table as he speaks, and with folded arms regards the doctor smilingly. His eyes are bright, his cheek is flushed, his hair thrown carelessly off his forehead. His old friend thinks he has never seen him look happier

or better before. Is it possible that this is the man who believes in a gloomy foreboding of death to such a degree as to permit it to sap the very springs of his existence? It appears incredible. And yet, beautiful as are his speaking features at this moment, there is a hectic spot upon his cheek and a glitter in his eye too deep, too bright for health. He looks like a votary of that terrible god Consumption, who bedecks her victims to the last, hides their sunken cheeks with roses, and lights up their dying eyes with the lamp of fever.

"No, my lord, I have not seen her ladyship since I entered the castle. I trust that she is well."

"O, I think so; but she complains of a little headache this morning. We were up rather late last night."

As he says the words some happy recollection strikes him, and a glorious smile breaks out over his countenance.

"Is she not beautiful, Newall? I don't think I ever saw such another figure, so graceful, so elastic, and yet so firm. It is difficult to conceive her ever getting ill."

"She appears, indeed, the very embodiment of health. I wish she could impart a little of her strength to you, my lord. You do not make the progress I should like to see."

His countenance falls directly.

"O, I'm well enough, Newall; as well as I shall ever be. Don't trouble yourself on my account."

"But I must trouble myself on your account, my lord. It is my duty as well as my interest. And when I consider how much depends upon your well-doing—what wealth you have to account for, what a wife to cherish, what a long race of heirs, I hope, of which to be the founder—I feel that no more sacred charge could have been placed into my hands by your dear lamented father than the charge of your health."

Lord Valence has shifted his place during this colloquy; he has moved from beneath the piercing gaze of the doctor's eyes, and is now walking restlessly about the apartment, taking up a book from one table and laying it down on another, but never bringing himself again under the scrutiny of his old friend.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Newall," he says, at length. "You have done your part of the business con-

scientiously, and if I don't repay your care, it's the fault of my constitution alone. The cleverest doctor in the world can't keep life in a sinking body when the leak is sprung by Heaven."

"I don't believe Heaven has anything to do with the springing of your leak, my lord," replies the doctor, bluntly.

Valence colors.

"I don't understand you. You've been attending me now for some years. I've followed your advice whenever it was practicable, and I've swallowed all your stuff. Why, didn't I even embark on the venturesome sea of matrimony on the strength of your advice? I don't see what a man could do more. And yet I don't get well. Feel my pulse!"

"It is at fever heat, my lord."

"And half an hour ago it was scarcely perceptible. My spirits, my energy, my appetite, play for nothing. I become feverish for the same cause. I am strong one hour, and utterly prostrated the next. You may be puzzled at my symptoms, but I know them well, Newall, and they mean—death."

"I know, too, that they mean—death."

"You agree with me at last, then?"

"Not entirely. The death you would signify is a succumbing to God's will. The death I mean is—suicide."

"Newall!"

"It is the solemn truth, my lord. There is no physical reason you should not live. If you die before your time, it will be by your own hand."

"This is strong language, Newall. I have not been used to hear you speak like this."

"Because I have never seen so clearly as I do now the stern necessity there is for my speaking so. I have watched your malady increasing year by year. I knew there was no ordinary cause for it, and I hoped that marriage, with all the interests and joys it brings in its train, might have the effect of weaning you from the contemplation of yourself. But what has been the result? You have youth, and every prospect of happiness, wealth, at your command, and a wife who loves you dearly—"

"God bless her!" cries his listener.

"Whom any man might be proud to call his own; for whom most men would sacrifice their dearest interests; resign their

most cherished hopes; and yet for whom—excuse me, my lord, if I offend you—you appear to be unable to give up even your unhallowed pursuits."

Valence's countenance clouds over again.

"I don't understand you," he repeats.

"Answer me frankly, my lord. Remember I have known you from a boy. Does the conviction that you are not long for this world spring entirely from your observation of your own health, or is there not rather some ulterior cause for your belief?"

He has touched his patron now upon his tenderest point, and the galled withers wince.

"I cannot perceive the object of your curiosity, Newall. Your business lies with my body; please to confine yourself to it."

"My business lies with your general health, and it is your mind which is affecting your body."

"I don't believe in the mind affecting the body. Besides, my theory—my conviction—Newall," he continues, suddenly interrupting himself, "you know of old how averse I am to metaphysical discussions on the reason of my ill health. If you consider that my blood is out of order, or my heart is affected, or any other of my natural functions require regulation, regulate them, for Heaven's sake, but leave the subject of my brain alone. I will attend to any reasonable directions you may give me. I will swallow any filth you may think fit to order me, but I won't be talked to as if I were a child or an idiot, ready to frighten myself into fits at the first shadow that crosses my pathway. You might as well tell me I am mad at once."

"You are mad," cries the old doctor, reckless of the effect his bold words may create. "You are worse than mad, my lord, to throw away all your chances of happiness for the sake of maintaining your reserve. I know you have a secret canker gnawing at your heart, that some thing, or act, or person, has laid on you too heavy a burden for you to bear. You will not confide in me—you will not take advantage of the benefit my advice, my reasoning, might afford you; and if you die (which God forbid!), weighed down by a load no mortal could sustain unaided and unharmed, you will as surely die by your own hand as though you placed the muzzle of a pistol in your mouth and blew out your brains."

The old man's unexpected energy has

startled Valence, who leans his weight against a table and turns pale visibly.

"Confide in me, my lord," continues Dr. Newall; "tell me everything, and it will go hard but we will find a remedy between us by which to exorcise the demon that holds you in his thrall."

"It is impossible—it would be useless," says the earl, with closed teeth. "You do not know of what you speak?"

"But if I do not know, I may be able to guess. Your secret studies are no secret to me, my lord; neither are they incomprehensible. I can imagine the hold they have gained over your natural feelings, the fetters they have cast about your mind. But let me hear the worst; disclose to me the utmost lengths to which they have misled you—the depths of mystery into which you have dived—and I may yet aid you to see daylight from the bottom of the dark well in which you seek for truth."

The earl becomes excited, his gestures are violent, his voice raised and discordant.

"I tell you again it is impossible. I can never tell what you desire, to you or any man. I have passed my word of honor. Now that you know that, you know you are renewing the subject at your own risk."

"Heaven pity you!" says Dr. Newall, sadly. "And you can resign that lovely wife of yours, give up all her love, her sweet companionship, her true sympathy, and go down into the grave before your time, for the sake of a chimerical honor which binds you to your superstition like a slave!"

"It would be useless to break my word," says Valence, faintly. "Nothing can save me now."

"It is not true!" exclaims the old doctor, loudly. "God can save you, my lord—but he helps those who help themselves. Be a man! Shake off this slough of superstition and blind bigotry which has unsexed you. Resolve to give up your unnatural studies; to have nothing more to do with them, or anything that concerns them, but to take your place bravely, like other men, upon the battle-field of life; and I'll engage, with the blessing of Heaven, to restore you to your former health and to your wife."

"Can it be possible?" cries Valence, starting forward, his face all aglow with the bright picture conjured up before him.

"To live, for her, with her! O no—it will never be. It is too good to be true!"

At this moment the library door opens, and Everil appears upon the threshold.

"May I come in, dearest? Ah, Dr. Newall, I did not know that you were here!"

Valence does not answer, but he turns his eyes wearily towards her. She comes forward and lays her hand upon his shoulder.

"Are you not well, love? O Valence! what is the matter? Speak to me! Do not frighten me like this!"

"Everil—my wife!" is all that he can say.

"I am glad you have come, Lady Valence," chimes in the doctor, in a cheerful voice. "I have just been speaking to your husband about the necessity of looking a little more after his health; and now I want you to persuade him to take a holiday somewhere—to go away together for a short time, that he may have change of scene and rest."

"You will come, my darling, for *my* sake!" she urges, tenderly, with her arms about him.

"What would I *not* do for your sake, Everil?" he answers.

"Except—break down your barriers of reserve," says the doctor, significantly.

"Except—prove false to my honor as a gentleman," the earl replies.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE EARL'S DIARY.

"MENTONE! I have been alone with her in this sweet place for the last ten days. Winter is on the world, but there is no trace of it here. The roses and myrtles are blooming as contentedly as if they were in the midst of summer, and the sun is so powerful and the air so soft and balmy, that we are out of doors all day long, with huge umbrellas over our heads. It is only after sunset that the atmosphere becomes chilly, and then we retreat to the shelter of our villa, and are together and—alone.

"Alone! with my dear girl's head resting on my shoulder, her sweet eyes fixed on mine, our hands clasped with a firm firm hold, that mutely says, 'till death.'

"In all my life, throughout my vague

dreamings, in my warmest imagination, I never conceived such happiness as this. This is our real honeymoon, our true marriage: when our hearts are no longer afraid to look on one another and to tell the truth—that we have loved and longed to show our love from the beginning. O Heaven! I have lived long enough, since I have lived to hear my wife say that she loves me. I hardly know how she brought me here. I found myself in Mentone almost before I knew that I was coming. I think it must have been some deep-laid plot between old Newall and herself to get me away from Castle Valence. Everil asked me to come for *her* sake, and how could I refuse?

"Anyway, I am here, and glad to be here. Would it could last forever! There was a grand commotion at the castle the day we left. Staunton had just taken his departure, and my friend Bulwer seized the opportunity of the party breaking up to declare his affection for Miss Mildmay. Of course the women were tremendously upset by the announcement. Alice cried, first in my wife's arms, and then in Agatha's arms; and both Everil and Agatha considered it due to the occasion to mingle their tears with *hers*, until poor Bulwer looked very much as if he wished he had never broached the subject, and would like to run away somewhere and hide himself. It happened on the very eve of our intended journey, and delayed it for a day, as Everil would not stir till her friends were made happy by a telegram from old Mildmay containing his consent to their engagement. Miss Alice then, all blushes, smiles and tears, took her departure for England; and Bulwer went home triumphantly. He's a dear good fellow, and I hope he may be as happy as he deserves; but I can't understand his caring for a pink-and-white piece of prettiness like Alice Mildmay. She's all very well, I dare say—healthy, and amiable, and lady-like; but when you come to compare her with—well, say with my Everil—what a difference there is! The one, all fire, and energy, and action—the other, just a pretty simpleton, nothing more. In fact, I can't understand any man falling in love with any woman whilst Everil is within the range of sight. I tell my lady this, and she laughs and says it is very lucky for me that other people are not of the same opin-

ion, or she might be tempted to change her mind. *Change! Heaven!* how the word went through my heart like the point of a poniard! *Change!* Is it possible her heart can be ever less mine than it is at the present moment? I did not let her see it, but I *felt* the pallor that crept over my features at the idea. For the first time in my life I experienced the sting of jealousy. It is not a pleasant feeling. It made me cognizant at once of the fact that were it not for outward circumstances, I might be a murderer! I believe that were Everil to change towards me now—to take back the sweet love with which she has enriched my life, and bestow it on another—that I should kill him—that I should fly at his throat as a dog flies at a bull, and hang there till he dropped. And then I should get the heel of my foot upon his false-upturned face and grind it into a shapeless mass! Bah! Of what am I dreaming? Am I going to let this new beautiful love, instead of raising my nature, debase and lower it? O Everil, how unworthy I am of you! Were we to live long together, how disappointed you would become in me! But for the short time you are to be mine, I will keep all lesser feelings that dishonor our love out of sight, that you may have no bitter memories of me when I am gone.

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"Well, Bulwer and Alice are happy, and have promised to return to the castle at Christmas, when we hope to meet all our friends again. Staunton, too, is to be there. I cannot understand my wife's feelings with regard to Staunton. He appears to me to be a very nice young fellow—quick, good-natured and gentleman-like—and he is a special favorite of Agatha's; but Everil seems to have conceived a positive aversion to him. I never mention his name but she changes the subject, and has several times said she wishes she might never see him again. However, I asked him to rejoin us at Christmas, more for Agatha's sake than my own; for Agatha not only thinks very highly of young Staunton herself, but has evident reason for believing that Staunton thinks very highly of her. I have caught them several times lately whispering, with their heads close together, and looking very confused, and uncommonly like lovers, when I disturbed them. Well, I cannot

disguise to myself the truth that it would be a very good thing if Agatha did marry again. What is she to do, poor girl, when I am gone! Everil and she do not get on as well together as I should like to see. Bulwer cannot bear the sight of her, and says so openly. Even Alice Mildmay seems afraid of making her a friend; and the servants are almost really rebellious. No one seems to care for poor Agatha as I do; and even I must confess I should be happier, and feel freer, alone with my wife. Agatha and I had a sad scene a few evenings before we left Ireland. I think it must have been the day after we had decided to go, and I was putting away a few things in my library, when her tap sounded on the door. She looked haggard and careworn, as if she had been crying, and I accused her of the fact. She came up to my side and laid her hand upon my arm.

"How can I be otherwise than miserable, Valence," she said, "when I see all confidence between us is at an end?"

"I guessed she alluded to my projected journey, and told her how my wife had extracted a promise from me to go in the very presence of the doctor who had advised it.

"And should not I have advised the same?" she answered. "Have I not had at least as much care for your health as Everil has?"

"Her reproach came home to me; for, for the last five years Agatha has really been indefatigable in looking after my comfort, and devoting herself to me in every way. I always have been, and always shall be, grateful to her for her care and solicitude; but of course my affection for her fades into nothing by the side of what I feel for my wife. I tried to thank her; but I suppose my words sounded cold, for she refused to accept them as they were intended.

"It is of no consequence," she kept on repeating. "Of course I am nobody now. I knew that it must come to this; but O Valence, however happy you may be in the future, don't forget what I have been to you and poor Arthur! Don't forget the scenes we have passed through together—the wonders we have witnessed—the—"

"Her allusion recalled me to myself. I left the work on which I was employed, and staggered to a chair.

"Isola!" I murmured, "my father! my

brother!—how can you talk to me of a happy future, Agatha, when you know my days are numbered—that I shall never live to see another year complete its course?"

"And if so, dear Valence, why should you not enjoy life to the close? If you have but a few more months to remain with us, why should they not be happy months? Isola would have them so. They would all have them so. Go to Mentone, and be as happy as you may. It is not of your probable happiness I complain; it is that you should think I should not be the first to rejoice at it?"

"But her words had quenched all my joy. I threw the articles I was packing away down on the floor in a heap.

"What is the use," I exclaimed, angrily, "of my attempting to cheat myself into the idea that I can enjoy life or love like other men? The dark shadow of death hangs over everything I do and say. I am a doomed creature, and even my wedding feast is spread on a funeral pall."

"Dear Valence, this is wrong—this is ungrateful," said Agatha, softly. "What would Isola say?"

"My sister-in-law has a very sweet voice and winning way; but I wish she wouldn't introduce the mention of Isola upon every occasion. I know my fate well enough—no one can blind my eyes to it; but surely I may forget it for a while—for a little while—and deceive myself, if I can, into the belief that it has never been revealed to me.

"I am sick of the name of Isola," I exclaimed, impetuously. "All my unhappiness, all my want of courage has sprung from the moment I heard it mentioned."

"O Valence!" said Agatha, reproachfully; "and after all her kindness—when she loves you so!"

"Was it kindness to disclose to me a secret that has embittered my existence ever since? Was it love to hang a drawn sword by a hair over my head, that might descend at any moment? That is what Isola has done for me. If she foresaw the doom in store for me, why couldn't she let me go on, like other men, in happy ignorance until the moment came? Anticipation, which is the worst part of pain, has killed my heart before my body dies."

"Never mind, Valence—let us say no more about it."

"But here a sense of my ingratitude

struck me. Why was I such a coward—such a traitor to the cause to which my life has been dedicated? I turned and seized my sister-in-law's hand.

"'Forgive me, Agatha; but if you knew how much I suffer! To love her so much—to know she loves me—'

"'To know Everil loves you?' repeated Agatha, in an incredulous tone.

"'Yes. You may look surprised; but I do know it, thank God; and on the best authority. She has told it me with her own dear lips.'

"'O, she has told it you herself, has she?' replied my sister-in-law; but I did not quite like the sound of her voice.

"'Her own self. Did you know it, Agatha?—did you guess it?'

"'I certainly never guessed it. It is the last thing in the world I should have guessed.'

"'But it is true as heaven; and it is at her wish that I am going to Mentone, that we may have a few weeks of quiet happiness together. Nor can you wonder, Agatha, that, if possible, I should like to forget, if only for this sweet brief interval of pain, the fate that lies before me.'

"'O no. It is very natural, my dear Valence, and I only hope you may forget it. I hope you may be very happy, and find no cause to regret old friends in the possession of new ones. I hope you may never be disappointed in anything you desire, nor place too much confidence in a rotten weed. And I could hardly wish a better wish for you than that, could I, my poor boy?'

"'Her words were kind, so was her manner, as she kissed and left me. There was nothing in either that I could find fault with; and yet they left an unpleasant impression on my mind, as though she thought me an infatuated fool for loving Everil when I shall so soon be called on to exchange this world for another.

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"'Everil is so different from Agatha; indeed, she is different from any woman I ever met in the world before. I did not understand her until I brought her to this sweet quiet place, where we are together all day long, and know no one to break in upon our solitude and distract our thoughts from one another's company. At her own home in Herefordshire she was always so grand, and stately, and dominant, so much

'La Belle Chatelaine,' that I almost forgot she was a girl in years; and since we have been married, her distress at our mutual reserve and unconscious fear lest we should never love each other have made her appear still more womanly in her proud silence and melancholy. But now that the floodgates of our hearts have been opened and all barriers are broken down between us, my darling has come out in a new character. She runs about the house, she talks, she laughs, she dances, she sings, and it is only now and then, when some allusion to the future brings my destiny before her mind, that I see a dark cloud pass across her lovely face and quench the light of her dear eyes, as though they were blinded with unshed tears. But a smile, a caress from me, has power to make the sun break out again; and I can sometimes hardly believe that the bright happy girl who sits on my knee, or at my feet, coaxing me into laughter by her quaint mimicry, or almost moving me to tears by the exhibition of her love, is the same willful, defiant, and apparently heartless cousin who met me on our betrothal morn with the assertion that she would marry me all the same were I a chimpanzee. We have often talked over that time. Everil has spoken of it and lamented over it till her sweet face has been bathed in tears, and I have been forced to make her smile again by an account of my first impression of herself, and what a dreadful hoyden I thought I was taking as a wife. We have talked over everything that has either distressed or gladdened us. We have had sweet confidences that have laid our hearts mutually bare and made us feel that never again can we misunderstand each other. But there is one topic that we cannot approach with ease, and that is spiritualism.

"'Everil has attempted it. Greatly as she shudders at the remembrance of the night she spent with me in the library—that night which proved to be the saddest and most joyful of my life, inasmuch as it gave me what I longed for, only to name the very hour when I must resign it again—she has forced herself to question me searchingly and to try and argue me out of the reason of my belief. I have told her as little as I could in reply. Why should I leave the dear child my sad experience as a legacy? Rather would I have her, when

I am gone, forget that such a fatal study exists, or that it had any part in embittering the short time we spent together. She is stronger minded and more courageous than the generality of her sex; she is also cleverer and more independent. What if the relation of my experience should cause her at any time to determine to solve such mysteries for herself!

"O, if I thought that my beautiful blooming Everil would ever lose her health and spirits as I have done in the pursuit of this fatal and unnatural study, I would tear my tongue out to-night rather than utter another syllable upon the subject. She is very pertinacious. It is difficult to silence her when she is once bent upon discovering a thing. She coaxes and coaxes, and questions and argues, till I am fain to give her a blunt denial. Then she draws herself a little away from me, and says, poutingly:

"'You do not love me, Valence.'

"*Not love her!* Good heavens! if she could only know how I love her. That I would not resign this brief life of love with her for a century without her! and rather see her eyes beaming on me as they

are beaming now, for one short moment, than possess all the loves of all the other women in the world eternally.

"O Everil, if you only knew how much I love you!

"Old Newall's words ring in my ears day and night—'I'll engage to restore you to your former health and to your wife.'

"What would I not give to prove them true!

"Sometimes I fancy, if we could stay forever in this sequestered spot, where it is always summer, and the bright life around us seems to deaden my ears to sounds from the spiritual world, I might pass over that fatal date in safety.

"Pshaw! What folly am I writing! Has it not been decreed by a Higher Power than I have communicated with? Are not his angels ministering spirits sent forth to bear his fiat to mankind? As if I—as if she—as if anything lower than himself could cancel his own words. There is nothing left for me but to submit.

"Yet O, my love! my wife! how beautiful this world appears! How hard it is to quit contentedly—whilst you are here!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE-MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHO SAID THAT I WAS JEALOUS?"

By Christmas Lord and Lady Valence are again at the castle, and find a bevy of their old friends ready to welcome them home. Agatha has been busy sending out invitations in their absence, and Everil finds the house much fuller than she expected. General Hawke and Mr. Mildmay have accompanied Alice back to Ireland; Staunton has procured the leave he anticipated; Bulwer is there, as a matter of course; and even Miss Strong has ventured across the channel to spend a few weeks of her Christmas holidays with her old pupil. Lady Valence hardly understands what this large gathering portends, but Agatha has been used to dispense the hospitality of Castle Valence as she chooses, and has generally some unfathomable motive for her actions. Her very mode of greeting the newly-arrived couple takes Everil by surprise. The air of injured innocence with which she dismissed them has completely vanished, and the sincerest of their well-wishers could not have been more hearty in his congratulations on the visible improvement in their appearance.

"My dears!" she exclaims, warmly, as she seizes a hand of each. "How wonderfully well you look! Everil has grown quite rosy; and as for Valence, I don't believe I should have known him if I had met him in the street. How delighted Dr. Newall will be! But what a paradise you seem to have come from! Your descriptions of Mentone quite made my mouth water; I would have given anything to join you."

"You must go there for your next honeymoon, Agatha," says Valence, laughing.

"You naughty boy! you malicious wicked creature! when you know I was only rejoicing over it for your sake. Well, it has worked wonders for you; there is no doubt about that. What a blessing you went! How can we ever be sufficiently thankful?"

"How is Arthur?" inquires Everil, rather anxious to stop this stream of hyperbole.

"Very well, dear, and growing charmingly. Miss Strong hardly knew him again. She says he is twice the size he was six months ago. Are you not very much obliged to me, Everil, for giving you such an agreeable surprise as finding dear Miss Strong here?"

"I am very glad to see her," says Everil.

"Why, what a tone! you fickle girl! when you were doing all you could to get her to come and live with you three months ago."

"Three months ago is not to-day," rejoins the countess, gayly. "And I am sure I never expressed the slightest wish to see General Hawke again. We never did anything but fight so long as I was under his guardianship, and if he is as contradictory and fault-finding now as he was then, I am afraid General Hawke and I shall quarrel."

"Fancy your not wishing to see the dear old general?" replies Agatha, in a tone of affected disappointment; "and when I had such trouble to get him over. I thought it would please you so much to be surrounded by all your old friends at Christmas."

"O, it doesn't signify; he is quite welcome to spend his Christmas here; but as you invited him here, Agatha, I hope you will take the task of entertaining him upon yourself. As well as Captain Staunton, and the rest of your own guests."

"Captain Staunton a guest of mine?" cries injured innocence, with a look of horror; "that is not fair. Valence invited him to come here himself. Did you not, Valence?"

"Yes, I think I must take the onus of that invitation on my own head. But I gave it for your sake, Agatha."

"For my sake?"

"Of course. You like the man; Everil does not; so I should not have thought of asking him on her account. But I do not suppose he will stay very long."

"I know nothing about that, Valence. It is entirely your affair, and I must beg you will not bring my name into the business."

"Hallo! what's up now? Have you had a lovers' quarrel? It will be all right again to-morrow, Agatha. Remember the old lines:

"The falling out of faithful friends
Renewing is of love."

"Valence, I wish you would not speak in this manner. It is most annoying to me," cries the little widow, almost in tears.

"Don't tease her," adds his wife. And Lord Valence makes some jesting reply, and leaves the room.

"It must seem so strange to you, dear," says Agatha, in an apologetic manner, as soon as they find themselves together, "to hear him talk in such an absurd manner. Even if it were true, I could never let him mention it before you." No woman likes to find herself forgotten."

"Are you alluding to that old business, Agatha? O, pray have no fears on my account. It would not cause me a single pang if Captain Staunton were to marry to-morrow."

"Ah! you say that because you know how safe you are. No man who had cared for you, Everil, would be likely to forget you easily."

"Yet you have given Valence to understand that Captain Staunton comes here for your sake."

Agatha starts and changes color.

"Did he tell you so? What a sieve that old Valence is! Well, should it ever come to pass, Everil (which is very—very improbable), I know I should have to play second fiddle all my life, and accept the position as gracefully as I could."

"I don't think there are many men worth marrying under those circumstances, Agatha, and Captain Staunton is not one of them. However, let us change the subject, for, to tell you the truth, I do not care to discuss it. As Valence told you just now, it was not by my wish that Captain Staunton was invited to the castle, and if he does not come for the sake of seeing you, I suppose it will be for the last time. But I have kept too long away from my guests, and must return to the drawing-room. Will you come with me? Thanks. There are rather too many for me to engage alone."

It is a cold, dark December afternoon, just a couple of days before Christmas, and in the drawing-room they find the whole

party crowded round the fire, and talking gayly to one another of every topic under the sun—Lord Valence's voice being the loudest and the gayest of all. As they perceive their hostess, they fall apart, to enable her to enter the circle, where she finds herself close to her husband.

"Rather different from Mentone, dear," she says, with a smile that makes old Miss Strong's eyes quiver with emotion.

"Yes indeed. Come nearer to the fire, Everil. Give me your hands. Why, they are as cold as ice! What have you been doing?"

"Only talking to Agatha."

"On disagreeable topics, I am afraid," interposes Maurice Staunton, insinuatingly.

"They were not agreeable ones to me."

"Well, my lady," says General Hawke, in his gruff style, "and how many horses' knees have you broken since you came to Castle Valence?"

"I've broken nothing, general—not even a heart!"

Valence, lover-like, is longing to put in something here, but etiquette restrains him.

"Not your husband's?" continues the general, coarsely.

"Not yet," she returns, trying to pass his words off as a jest.

"That's a miracle," says General Hawke; and subsides into a newspaper.

"I am longing to see all over this beautiful place, my dear," whispers Miss Strong, who only arrived the day before. "It looks a perfect paradise from my windows."

"And so it is a paradise—of happiness," replies Everil, in the same tone. "I will show you round the premises the first fine day we have, Miss Strong. I have two or three very favorite haunts here, one especially, where dear Valence has been accustomed to study, in fine weather, ever since he was a little boy."

"O my dear, I am so pleased—so thankful to find you thus," says the old governess, with a significant squeeze of the hand, which she finds as significantly returned.

"How pleasant it is to see you all here!" exclaims the host, warmly. "We shall no longer be able to complain of the dullness of the castle in winter, Everil."

"It could never be dull to me, Valence," she replies.

"Come, darling, that is going rather too far, even for such a pair of turtle-doves as you are," interposes Mrs. West. "I re-

member you told me that when you first saw Castle Valence, even though it was in June, you shivered from the effects of its mere appearance. *Have you forgotten what a dislike you took to the poor library? Why, I heard you declare one day that you would never enter it again.*"

"I know better now," says Everil; but she looks uncomfortable, even at the mention of that ill-fated room.

"And what is the history of the library?" demands Maurice Staunton, in his most persuasive voice. "Is it haunted? You ought to possess a haunted room in so old and important-looking a residence as this!"

Bulwer glances at the countess; her eyes are fixed upon her husband.

"Haunted!" says Valence, with a slight laugh; but his eyes move uneasily from *side to side as he speaks*. "What with? The apparition of a headless man, or the sound of rustling silks? Those are the two stock horrors of haunted houses, Staunton; but I have never seen either of them myself."

"Indeed! Perhaps you are not clairvoyant, as the occult call it. Has Lady Valence been more fortunate?" he continues, turning to Everil, who has risen, and now stands by the earl.

"The worst apparitions I have met with here," she answers, bravely, "are kind thoughts, and words, and actions. The castle is haunted by them, thanks to my husband."

Valence casts a look of gratitude upon her, and Staunton perceives it is his cue to follow in its train.

"Well put, Lady Valence; and not less well than true. Of that, no one who has enjoyed the hospitality of your roof needs an assurance. Though I cannot allow that the castle is complete *without a ghost*, there is no necessity you should be troubled to bear witness to its reality. Perhaps I may be the lucky man to evoke the hereditary shadow."

"O, don't talk of the 'hereditary shadow,'" cries Agatha, "or you will send Everil into hysterics. You evidently are not acquainted with the legend of the Valence family; that in every fourth generation—"

"Agatha! I will thank you not to repeat that lying prophecy," exclaims the earl, with apparently unneeded energy; "you know how averse I am to *tittle-tattle*."

"Call a prophecy of upwards of two

hundred years old *tittle-tattle*!" rejoins Mrs. West. "I think you are most disrespectful to the warnings of your ancestors, Valence! Besides, remember how singularly it has been fulfilled. You have surely not forgotten the story of your great-grandmother and the puissant duke of—"

"I tell you again I will not have such folly made the subject of discussion," says the earl, angrily. "The rumor was as false as its forerunner. But had the prophecy proved true from generation to generation, it must have failed now, when Castle Valence is in the possession of myself and Everil."

"Very good, dear. I am sorry I alluded to it; but it was poor Arthur's fault it ever reached my ears. He was never tired of talking of his family history."

The earl mutters something not very respectful to the memory of his dead brother, and the conversation is immediately diverted into a more agreeable channel.

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"What made you allude to that insane legend?" demands Valence of his sister-in-law, a few days later, as they chance to discuss the proceedings of the day in question. "You must have been aware it would not prove an agreeable topic."

"My dear Valence! how could I suppose you would be affected by it? But it has come curiously true, has it not? Still, I should have imagined that you—"

"That I, who have so short a time to live, must be entirely indifferent to what people may say of my wife? Not so, Agatha! The guardianship of my treasure may be soon wrested from my hands; but so long as they hold it no breath of scandal shall sully her fair name. I am a weak—a dying man—I know it well; but whilst I am a man that legend shall be proved a lie."

"You talk with much certainty, my dear brother-in-law; but I thought that ladies were generally considered to be the guardians of their own honor. At all events, they should be capable of being so. Captain Staunton is not looking so well as he was in the autumn, is he?"

"What makes you bring Staunton's name in at this juncture? I thought we were discussing the folly of that old prophecy."

"And I thought you wished the subject ended."

"So I do. It is waste of time to speak of it."

"Then there can be no impropriety in my passing on to another topic. So I repeat that Maurice is not looking well. Everil was mentioning the fact to me only now."

"You have come to call him by his Christian name; eh, Agatha? Your intimacy is advancing fast!"

"I think I only repeated what dear Everil said to me; but perhaps I had better not have mentioned it."

"Have mentioned what?"

"O, never mind. I hate bandying words in this manner. But she knew him, remember, before she ever set eyes on you."

"And if she did, you cannot compare a chance acquaintance with her husband."

"My dear Valence! as if anybody thought there could be any comparison between you. As well liken a lion to a mouse! But you men are all tyrants, a set of jealous Bluebeards. I suppose if you found out that Everil had ever had a love affair before she met you, you would be up in arms at once!"

"On the contrary, she informed me frankly she had engaged in some such little *affaire de cœur*, but I had no wish to inquire further."

"O, you know all about it, then! What a load you have taken off my mind! I have been so afraid of putting my foot in it."

"How could you put your foot in it?" he replies, his suspicions immediately aroused by the uncertainty of her manner.

"Dear Valence, don't ask me anything further. If Everil has told you all, there is no need for me to supplement her narrative. I am so glad you take it in this liberal spirit. Most men would have made such a fuss. And, after all, 'least said soonest mended' is one of the best maxims we possess."

"From the way you speak, I infer you know the name of the man to whom my wife alluded."

The little widow stops short, and regards the earl with a look of astonishment.

"You don't mean to say she didn't tell you his name! O, the sly puss! Though, after all, it can't make the slightest difference."

"Of course not; yet I should like to hear it."

"How curious the male sex is!"

"If you know it, I see no reason why you should not confide it to me."

"My dear Valence, you might as well ask me to cut your head off. Divulge your wife's secrets! For shame! Inquisitiveness is a quality supposed to be peculiar to us poor silly women."

"Everil has no secrets from me; I am sure she would not mind your telling me."

"No—no! you must ask her yourself, though I hardly think you will obtain an answer—at least now."

"Is it any one in the house, then?" cries Valence, quickly.

"My dear Valence! how you do shake my nerves! Do you imagine dear Everil has had a little affair with General Hawke, or that poor dear stupid old Mildmay?"

"There are other men in the house besides Mildmay and Hawke," returns her companion, with a frown.

"You are growing suspicious in your old age, you naughty boy. There is nothing makes a woman so unhappy as to have a jealous husband."

"Jealous! Folly! Who said I was jealous? I am not a man to suspect wrongfully, and Everil would never give me a cause."

"If you believe that, you are all right. And as for this nameless gentleman who seems likely to disturb your peace of mind, take my advice, and think no more about him."

"I shall not. He is not worth thinking of."

"That is what Isola would tell you. By the way, did you get good manifestations at Mentone?"

"I did not try to get any."

"You have not spoken to Isola since you have been away from home?"

"Not once."

"O Valence! How fickle—how unkind of you! Poor Isola! She is indeed soon forgotten."

"I have not forgotten her—or anything. But I have been so happy, Agatha—the time of our absence passed so blissfully and peacefully away, I had not the courage to break in upon its calm."

"I thought Isola's messages were always of so comforting a nature."

"They used to be, in my solitude. But now of what can they remind me but separation and decay?"

"Will the loss of the spiritual affection you used to lean upon serve to make the contemplation of the change more bearable?"

"No. I see I have been wrong. I have been unkind—ungrateful. Yet I think the complete rest did me good, Agatha. Happiness is so new a feeling to me."

"My poor Valence! May it never prove a fallacious one. Well, go on, and be as happy as you may. And don't let this little snake in the grass have any power to mar your happiness. You start. Have you forgotten?—I mean the great unknown!"

He comes to the recollection with a sigh.

"Why should I? I thought we had already disposed of that subject. But I will not neglect Isola, Agatha. I will sit with you to-night as usual. Only—I think it will be as well not to mention our intention to dear Everil. She has grown so fidgety about my health lately, and so alarmed lest I should do anything to injure it. Yes, I should like to see Isola again. She may have some consolation for me—who knows! Mentone has done wonders for my body, and she may work a miracle for my sick soul."

"O dear Valence! I don't like to damp your spirits (it is so delightful to see you cheerful and happy again); only, remember Isola is not a mortal, and able to chop and change her opinions like the wind."

"You are right, Agatha. I am altogether too disposed to be hopeful. Well, let us make the appointment for twelve o'clock to-night; and, meanwhile, not a word to Everil."

As soon as his sister-in-law has left him, the earl relapses into his first mood, and begins to wonder who his wife's first love can possibly have been.

"It is strange she did not mention his name to me," he soliloquizes. "She said, if I remember, rightly, that the name could not signify—that she had done with him and with his name forever." At this remembrance his countenance grows brighter. "Of course she did, dear girl! She said she had done with him forever; and Everil is not the woman to tell a lie. She trusted me; I will trust her in the same way—I should be less than man if I did otherwise. From this hour to that of my death, she shall never hear the subject mentioned by me."

Having arrived at this conclusion, he

goes in search of her, but rambles through the vast rooms in vain. The countess is not in the castle. That fact is self-evident, but no one appears able to inform him where she is.

Lord Valence passes out into the grounds, and makes the terrace walks and gardens reecho with the name of Everil, yet she does not answer to the call. Puzzled, and somewhat disappointed, he orders his horse round from the stables, and sets off for a ride, thinking he may encounter his wife in some of the lanes surrounding Castle Valence. As he traverses the drawbridge and enters the leafless park, he comes upon her suddenly. She is not alone. By her side, walking close and talking earnestly, is Captain Staunton. Something in the sight seems to paralyze Lord Valence. He reins in his steed and addresses her.

"What are you doing here, Everil? The morning is rather cold for outdoor exercise."

She greets him with a bright loyal smile and takes up her position by his saddle girths, Maurice Staunton standing a little on one side, and digging vigorously in the earth with his slender cane.

"Cold, dearest! I am as warm as possible. I was just saying I think we shall have a thaw. Where are you off to?"

"Only for a ride to kill time. I was in hopes you would have accompanied me."

"O what a pity! I should have enjoyed it so much. But to dress now would bring it too near luncheon. Besides, Captain Staunton asked me out here for a special purpose. He wanted to speak to me."

"Very good. I hope you will enjoy yourselves," replies the earl, coldly, as he prepares to move on. She does not perceive his humor. She does not attempt to detain him.

"Good-by, dear. And do not be late for luncheon, as you were yesterday," she calls out, gayly, as he turns his back upon her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"WHO GAVE YOU THOSE FLOWERS?"

WHAT Everil said was true. Maurice Staunton had asked for a private interview with her. As breakfast was ended that morning he had approached her side, so as to be out of hearing of the others, and

said, in a low voice, "If Lady Valence will not consider the request impertinent or obtrusive, may I ask for a few minutes' private conversation?"

Her first impulse was to refuse him. His very presence had become obnoxious to her; she hated the thought of the intimacy which had formerly existed between them, and, above all things, dreaded that he should make an allusion to it. For a moment she was silent, and he seemed to guess what was passing through her mind.

"My business does not concern myself alone," he said. "It involves the welfare of another person." And the countess's thoughts immediately flew to Agatha.

"If that is the case, and it is anything of importance, Captain Staunton, I shall be happy to talk to you on the subject; but I have not much time to spare, with so many guests to attend to."

"Half an hour will be sufficient."

"I am just going to take my dogs a run through the park. Perhaps you would like to accompany me?"

"I shall be but too grateful for the privilege."

"Very well; then you will find me on the terrace in ten minutes' time."

She would have avoided him altogether if she could; but she thought that, when asked, she could hardly do less than this for a guest invited by her husband; and, averse as she was to mentioning a circumstance of which she had become heartily ashamed, she resolved, whilst dressing herself for her morning ramble, that if an opportunity occurred, she would speak out boldly to Maurice Staunton, tell him how distasteful his presence was to her, and ask him, as a gentleman, to rid her of it henceforward.

"I think I can guess what it is you wish to speak to me about," she continued, as they took their way towards the park. "It concerns my sister-in-law, Mrs. West, does it not?"

Maurice Staunton put on an expression of well-acted surprise.

"How very strange! I did not think anybody had seen it but myself."

"That is a common error under similar circumstances, Captain Staunton. But Agatha is not of a very reticent disposition, remember."

"You distress me to a marvellous de-

gree, Lady Valence. What can you possibly think of it all?"

Here she colored vividly, but did not hesitate. "I anticipated you would say something of the kind. I imagined it was for that purpose you asked to speak to me alone; and I tell you truly, Captain Staunton, that had it not been so, I should not have granted you this interview. But, as things have taken so unexpected a turn, it is best we should speak plainly to each other, and come to a perfect understanding."

"You are, as you always were, all goodness; only you will promise not to misapprehend my meaning?"

"I will believe your statement, as you make it; it would be impossible to do more; only be brief, if you please, and keep to the matter in hand."

"Let us premise, then, that I had no idea of what was coming, or I should not have accepted the earl's generous invitation to the castle."

"I do not follow you. It appears to me the only reason for which you need have come."

"But it was so unexpected, so entirely spontaneous. You must remember that last May—"

"Please to keep to the matter in hand, Captain Staunton."

"How shall I put it, then? You know I never felt anything for Mrs. West except friendship; and had I done otherwise, I should have wooed her anywhere but here."

"We seem to be playing at cross-purposes. How could you woo her except in her own home?"

"Under your eyes?"

"O Captain Staunton! let us understand each other here. If I had any objection to seeing that you had engaged the affections of my sister-in-law, it would be from a very different motive from that with which you credit me. I am more than indifferent to the past; I dislike the remembrance of it. Were Agatha my own sister, I might be alarmed for her well-doing; but as she is only my husband's sister-in-law, and perfectly capable of looking after herself, all I can say is, that if she mars her happiness by marrying you, it will not be for want of warning and experience."

"But—excuse me, Lady Valence—you speak as if the feeling existed on both

sides. Can Mrs. West have voluntarily deceived you?"

"Do you mean to insinuate that it is her affections alone that are engaged—that you have no serious intentions respecting her—that you are going to repeat the villany—"

But here she stopped. It was too great a compliment to him to speak so vehemently of his defection towards herself.

"Your ladyship is hard on me," he replied, mournfully.

"Tell me the truth, then," said Everil. "Are you, or are you not, in earnest respecting Mrs. West? She imagines that you are. She has hinted as much both to the earl and myself. I thought you had brought me out here expressly to say you wished to marry her."

"I wish to marry Mrs. West! I am placed in a very painful position, Lady Valence; but I will conceal nothing from you. I asked to speak to you with a very different intention—in order to tell you that your sister-in-law, having been good enough to conceive a certain interest in me, which I unfortunately find myself unable to return, has threatened to disclose the fact of our former relations to the earl, and inform him that I have assumed the appearance of affection for herself for the sole purpose of obtaining a footing in Castle Valence."

"She could never stoop so low!" cried the countess, indignantly.

"She says she will do so; and I appeal to you, Lady Valence, to tell me what I shall do. I place myself in your hands; you may command my actions."

"If this is true, you should leave the castle, and never return to it. If Agatha carries out her threat, she will only tell the earl of what he knew before; but perhaps your departure may prevent the renewal of so unpleasant a topic."

"Do you mean to say that Lord Valence knows—all?"

"I mean to say that I have told him as much as he would care to know. I have no secrets from my husband. For Agatha's sake—supposing what she said was true, that she was the attraction that brought you here—I did not mention your name; but with your departure I should have no objection to do so."

"But will not flight look very much like guilt?"

"I do not know. I should not care. If you did not come here for Agatha, there is no reason why you should stay. You must have seen that your presence is distasteful to me."

"I have seen, and mourned over it bitterly."

"Captain Staunton, this interview and its results give me an opportunity which I have wished for. I am sorry, as your hostess, to be obliged to say anything that appears rude or inhospitable, but as I was unable to imagine what should have induced you to accept the first invitation you received to come here, so am I now unable to understand, hearing what you have told me this morning, why you permitted it to be renewed. If you do not come for the purpose of seeing my sister-in-law, you inflict unnecessary annoyance on me, for my only wish with respect to yourself is to forget that we ever met each other."

"If you are entirely indifferent to the memory, why should it continue to pain you?" he muttered.

"It does not pain, but it irritates me! I see now what a fool I was to have preferred you even for a moment to such a man as Valence. This sounds terribly rude, I know, but I must tell you the truth. I love my husband dearly!"

"You know how to torture a man, Lady Valence."

"If the intelligence tortures you, it can be only through wounding your self-love. But knowing this, you must feel how little I can care for seeing you. If I had my own wish, I would never look on you in this life again. And had it not been for Agatha, I should have told you so before, and prevented a repetition of your visit."

"You are queen here, Lady Valence, and I have nothing to do but to bow to your wishes. But how differently we feel upon this subject! I have become an object of aversion to you—"

"Not quite an object of aversion!" she cried, relenting her harsh words.

"The next thing to it, then; whilst I, however sad I may feel the retrospect to be, can never look upon the past except as sacred. But you are mated and happy—whilst I am—alone. Perhaps that may cause the difference."

"Of course it does! You will be married too, some day, and thank God you waited till the right person came!"

It was at this juncture they perceived the earl riding towards them. Everil's face lit up like the sun.

"There is my husband! I wonder where he is going!" and then ensued the brief conversation narrated in the last chapter.

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"You have not yet told me what I am to do with regard to Mrs. West?" says Maurice Staunton, as Lord Valence again leaves them.

"It is really a most difficult matter on which to advise you. Agatha is not a young girl on her promotion. I think you had better speak as openly to her as you have done to me, and then leave the castle."

"I am to be banished, then, in the midst of my holidays. It is rather hard!"

"I do not banish; I simply advise you."

"You would not speak to Mrs. West for me?"

"Decidedly not! I must refuse to have anything to do with her affairs or yours, Captain Staunton."

"If I speak to her and she is reasonable enough not to demand my immediate absence, may I stay here for the remainder of my visit, Lady Valence?"

"That decision must rest with yourself, or her. I did not invite you to the castle, remember! You are, I believe, my husband's guest, and accountable to him only, for the length of your visit. It is entirely indifferent to me what you do."

At this he sighs and makes no answer.

"All the same," continues the countess lightly, after a pause, "I don't think it would be a bad arrangement if you were to marry Agatha. She is still young and pretty, and she has a tolerable income of her own. What are your objections to the match?"

"I shall never marry!"

"Indeed! I think I have heard people make the same observation before. You will not marry till you see some one richer than Agatha, perhaps; but I would not give much for your determination when that occurs."

"Your own position is so strong, you can afford to be cruel."

"No! Don't say that! Say I am so happy myself, I can afford to laugh a little at other people. But here we are on the terraces again, and I must go and look after my lady guests. Good-by for the present."

"Say that we are friends, Lady Va-

lence?" he pleads, humbly, as they are about to separate.

"I can never say that any one whom my husband takes by the hand is *not* my friend," she answers, gravely; and he is compelled to be content with the equivocal reply.

* * * * *

The following day the countess is standing by her boudoir table rapt in thought. Valence has not appeared so cheerful the last few hours, and the fact worries her. Either he is not well or out of temper, and in either case she fears that the study she so much dreads for him is at the bottom of the change. Ever since they returned to the castle she has been longing to ask him to have nothing more to do with spiritualism, but his gayety has prevented her alluding to a subject which is always sure to bring a cloud upon his brow. But should his present humor continue, she resolves at all costs to speak out plainly, and tell him he is killing her with himself. Would that rouse him? she thinks, eagerly. Would the idea that he was injuring her have any power to dispel his infatuation?

As she ruminates, a modest tap sounds upon her door, and on her giving the usual permission for entrance, who should appear but Maurice Staunton carrying a bouquet of hothouse flowers!

"O, is it you, Captain Staunton! I thought you had gone to Ballybroogan."

"Gone and returned with this trophy in my hand. May I lay it at your feet, Lady Valence?"

"What splendid camellias! I wonder how it is that the O'Connors get everything floral better than we do. Ifancy our houses must have been very much neglected before I came. These are certainly prize blossoms."

"Then they are all the fitter to present to you. Is my little offering accepted?"

She does not quite know what to say. She has no wish to take anything from Captain Staunton, but she feels that to make a fuss about doing so would invest the act with an importance of which it is not worthy. So she answers, carelessly:

"O, certainly—if you have no one else to give them to. I suppose Mrs. O'Connor intended they should come to me. Please put them on the table, Captain Staunton. I am just going to embroider, and the stalks will soil my fingers."

"They are protected by paper."

"So they are. But the flowers will not last unless they are placed in water, so I will ring for my maid to perform the operation."

"May I stay and see it done?"

"Certainly not! This room is strictly private, and no one ever enters it but my husband—except on invitation. I shall be down to luncheon. Good-morning."

She allows him no alternative but to withdraw; which, looking rather crestfallen, he does, leaving the door open behind him.

A footstep sounds along the passage. Everil takes up the flowers, and turns towards the doorway with them in her hand.

"Parsons," she commences, thinking the new-comer to be her maid.

But it is Lord Valence who stands before her.

She is about to greet him warmly, when, glancing from her face to the flowers in her hand, he demands in a rough tone, utterly unlike his usual gentle manner:

"Who gave you those flowers?"

"Captain Staunton, dear; he has just brought them over from Ballybroogan."

The earl raises his hand and dashes the bouquet to the ground.

"I won't have you accept flowers from any d—d jackanapes who chooses to bring them to you," he exclaims, loudly.

"Valence! Valence! what is the matter? What makes you behave in such an extraordinary way?"

But the next moment he has flung his arms wildly round her, and clasped her to his breast.

"O my darling! my own, own darling! never make me jealous, or I shall go mad!"

"Make you jealous, dear Valence!—how could I, when I love you so much? I would lay down my life for you, Valence!"

"I know you would! I feel you would! This is an insanity that has come over me. But I am so unfit to love you, Everil! I am so unused to pay women these small attentions; and then, when others steal a march on me, I am angry with myself and you, poor innocent child! and fancy you must prefer their company to mine. But you don't—do you, Everil?"

"My love! how can you talk like this, when I have said that you are dearer to me than all the world beside? What do I care for flowers, or anything else that does not come from your hands? I did not even

wish to take them, but Captain Staunton would insist upon leaving them on the table."

"Forgive me, darling! It is all my wretched temper. But you are so precious to me, Everil! I could not bear to lose even the least morsel of your interest. It is very strange," he goes on musingly, "I do not seem ever to have known what jealousy was before you told me that you loved me. When I thought you were indifferent to me, I was miserable and discontented; but now that I know I possess all your heart, I am in constant terror lest you should discover how unworthy I am of such a treasure, and take it back again."

"You wrong me, Valence," she says, reproachfully.

"I know I do—and I will crush out the wretched feeling as though it were a temptation from the devil. But, O Everil!" he continues, earnestly, "never make me jealous, even in the remotest degree, or you will raise a demon in me difficult to quell. If I felt your heart were going from me, I should forget everything in the world beside—sickness, sorrow, misfortune, even death itself, would appear less than nothing by comparison. My life is in your hands—as is all my hope, and trust, and joy. Tell me, dearest, that I am safe—that you will never care for any man as you now care for me."

"You know I shall not, Valence!—that I am yours, and yours only, until death parts us!"

"Ah!—and that will be for such a little while!—such a little, little while! I shall go before you have learnt how much I love you in return. To-morrow, Everil, will be the first of January—the last new year that I shall ever see on earth."

"I cannot believe it!" she whispers, as with closed eyes she leans against his breast. "You will be saved, even though God has to send an angel from heaven to rescue you!"

"You are my angel!" he answers, fondly; "and it is God who sent you to cheer the last months of my life, and make even the prospect of death, in your arms, seem like an easy sleep!"

"I will be your angel!" exclaims Everil, suddenly but determinately.

She does not know by what means her resolution will be performed. The future is all dark before her, and no help appears

on any side; yet in that moment of inspiration she believes that what she says will come to pass, and that she has been raised up for the salvation of her husband. A mighty faith takes possession of her soul; her eyes kindle; she lifts her drooping head from Valence's breast, and stands upright, feeling as though she had the strength of a lion to accomplish his deliverance.

"*I will save him!*" she thinks again to herself when he has left her. "I cannot see the way, or the means; it is all confusion and mystery; but something or somebody spoke to me at that moment, and told me that if I have the will, the way is not inscrutable. I told Alice long ago, when we were talking about love, and she was arguing the subject in her feeble manner, that there was no love worthy of the name in these effete modern days. No love that would sacrifice itself for its object; that would trample down all obstacles that lay between them; endure the breath of shame and obloquy—and even render back the love that makes its own happiness, in order to secure that of the beloved.

"Could I do as much as that for Valence, I wonder? If I could save him by it—restore him to his reason and his friends—could I bear that he should think me heartless, ungrateful, unworthy of his true affection, and bear his scorn and his contempt, where I now receive his love?

"Could I bear to see him pining for the caresses I longed but did not dare to bestow on him; and find, when he was cured of his sick fancies and mad infatuation, that he was also cured of any liking for myself?

"It would be terrible! It would be worse, a thousand times, than merely giving up my poor life in exchange for his. It would be a moral suicide—a living death—the tomb closed over all my hopes whilst they still struggled and fought for existence!—yet I think that I could bear it—for him!

"To see him restored to health, and life, and action; to know that the old name should not die out; that his intellect was once more free from clouds, and that my Valence should live to a good old age, and leave an honored memory behind him—to obtain this, I would sacrifice all that I possess, even to his precious love!

"O my husband! I think there must be some true love left, even in these 'effete modern days.'"

"I WILL DIE IN THE ATTEMPT."

A FEW days afterwards John Bulwer is seated before the fire in Dr. Newall's cottage, smoking, and engaged in conversation with the old man on the subject of Lord Valence's health. It is evening, and Bulwer has strolled down from the castle, after dinner, without confiding his intentions to any one. He is becoming seriously alarmed about his friend Valence, and Dr. Newall's remarks do not tend to decrease his fears.

"There is no doubt about it," says the old doctor, decisively; "the man will die!"

"But can nothing be done to save him?"

"I have done all I can. I have physicked him mentally and bodily. I have kept his blood cool with medicine, and I have placed the risk he is running as plainly before his eyes as common English words will do it. He heeds neither my warning nor my advice. He has taken every possible means to kill himself."

"Is he insane?" asks Bulwer in a low voice.

"Temporarily, he is insane."

"Could he be treated for it?"

"No, Mr. Bulwer! A man may do the maddest things possible. He may risk his own life, or those of other people, squander his money, drink himself into a state bordering on idiocy, or deny himself the common necessities of existence; yet if he is capable of managing his domestic affairs, there is no law in England by which they can be managed for him. Lord Valence is in far greater need of control than half the poor wretches we confine in asylums. He can neither manage himself, his health, nor his estate. He has permitted a miserable superstition to obtain so firm a hold on his mind, that he is walking into the grave with his eyes wide open; yet there is no power but his own free will that can restrain him. I had hoped so much from the influence of the countess, who is one of the best women I ever came across; but from what you tell me, she appears, like the rest of us, to have failed."

"I have told you nothing but the truth. I can hardly describe to you what a difference even this last week has made in him, I knew, of course, that there was some mystery connected with his studies; but I had no idea of the evil till Lady Valence spoke to me last night. It seems too awful to

think that a man should throw his life away in this manner! Surely Mrs. West, who has been with him all these years, might have done something to prevent it."

"My dear young man!" exclaims Dr. Newall, emphatically, "don't repeat I said so, but Mrs. West is a snake in the grass, a double-distilled hypocrite, an incarnation of the Fiend himself. I detest that little woman! Mark my words! For all her peachy dimpled cheeks, and her sweet smile, and her insinuating manner, it will be found out some day that she has had more to do with her brother-in-law's infatuation than the world thinks for! I have tried to catch her in vain. She is as soft-footed as a cat, and as slippery as an eel; but I know that she rejoices at poor Valence's ill-health, and that the worst news you could take her would be the news of his recovery."

"But why should she harbor enmity against him, when he has so generously given her a home?"

"A home which she would like to retain altogether, Mr. Bulwer. Are you so blind as not to see she has a son, and that if the earl dies little Arthur will become Lord Valence? O, it is all as plain as a pike-staff to me. I read Agatha West's mind years ago. She only married poor Arthur because he stood a very good chance of getting the title; and when he so unexpectedly died, she turned all her attention to the interests of her child."

"I knew Mrs. West was a deceitful woman, but I little thought she could be as bad as that."

"If a woman is deceitful, Mr. Bulwer, she will go to any lengths her fancy may direct her. A bad woman—and by a bad woman I mean a godless woman—is generally very bad indeed. The sex has too little foresight, too feeble reasoning power, too little fear of consequences, to be upright and honorable on principle alone. Touch their hearts—make them once believe in and feel the love of the man-god for their individual selves, and they will be capable of any sacrifice for his sake; but without this power of emotion they are unsexed—no longer women as God intended women to be, yet without the mental strength of man. A man can be moral from no other sense than that it is for the good of society he should be so; a woman snaps her fingers at society, and if she be

not moral because the Almighty is offended by sin, will, in all probability, embrace the first opportunity of falling. A man may be irreligious and yet honorable in his transactions; if a woman is not religious, Mr. Bulwer, she is nothing at all; a building without foundation, an empty shrine, a bubble that bursts whilst you are looking at it! And yet some men complain that their wives are too fond of going to church, and singing psalms, and being generally God-fearing. Short-sighted fools! If, by forbidding their religious observances, or driving them through sheer weariness of argument to adopt a lighter course of action, they pull out the foundation stone so that the whole building totters and becomes frail, let them not complain if it fall on themselves, and crush them down to a deeper hell than their imaginations have ever pictured."

"You speak feelingly, Dr. Newall."

"I speak from experience, sir! I know that a woman must either belong to God or the devil, and that if she once gives herself up to the power of evil, there is no saying to what depths her feeble unprotected nature may not fall."

"What you have said of Mrs. West shocks me greatly."

"You would be more shocked if you could read her heart. If you have any regard for your friend, Mr. Bulwer, watch that woman—watch her day and night, and try to find out how far she influences him when away from his wife."

"I will. You have aroused my suspicions, and they shall not sleep again. Mrs. West has a spy dogging her footsteps from this time forward. Who can that be knocking at your door so late?"

"I cannot imagine. Lord Valence always turns the handle for himself. Bridget!" says Dr. Newall, calling into the passage, "there is some one knocking at the door. Bless that woman! she is always out of the way when I require her. I will answer it myself."

He undoes the fastenings, and finds upon the threshold a woman, breathless with running, and enveloped in a dark cloak, with a shawl about her head.

"Lady Valence!—at this time of night!"

"O, doctor don't look so astonished! It is not so very late, is it? And I have run all the way here from the castle, and I must go back directly, or he will miss me. Let

me come in, doctor. I must speak to you—I have so much to say!"

"Come in at once, my lady. It is unfit you should remain out in the cold—only I must tell you that Mr. Bulwer is sitting with me; so that if your communication is a private one—"

"I will go at once, if Lady Valence desires it," says Bulwer, rising to his feet.

"No, not at all," she answers, waving her hand. "I have no secrets that Mr. Bulwer may not hear. Only I have come, doctor, to tell you that I will save my

husband's life, or that I will die in the attempt."

She has thrown off the shawl from her head, and stands before them like some inspired prophetess. Her hair is disordered from the unusual headdress, her cheeks are crimson, her eyes are lighted with a feverish fire. Bulwer thinks as he looks at her that she ought to have a drawn sword in her hand.

"I will save my husband's life," she repeats, firmly, "or I will die in the attempt!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I WILL FIND IT—IF IT IS TO BE FOUND."

"COME in," says Dr. Newall, as he takes Lady Valence gently by the hand, and draws her in front of the little fire. "Come in, and tell us all about it."

But with her animated speech the countess's courage seems to have evaporated; and as she stands between the two men, whose eyes are turned inquiringly towards her, she looks more ready to weep than to declaim.

"O! what is there to tell?" she says, despairingly. "It is the old, old story—Valence is dying by inches. I had hoped so much from our visit to Mentone, doctor. He seemed so different there—so young, and buoyant, and hopeful. But it is all gone again. The curse fell on him directly he entered the doors of Castle Valence, and I hardly recognize him for the same creature."

"Has he resumed his midnight studies?" asks Dr. Newall.

"He has resumed everything that is most hurtful to his health; late hours, secret sittings, mysterious absences, and, above all, those fatal trances have again attacked him. He was in one—so he tells me, and from his appearance I can well believe it—for three hours last night. Sometimes he does not come to bed at all, and the morning finds him in that wretched library, with his pulse down to the very lowest ebb, and almost unconscious of what is passing around him. O Dr. Newall, if this goes on much longer, he will really die!"

"I know it, Lady Valence."

"But it must not be—it *shall* not be. Just now, too, when all life holds that is best and fairest is opening before his view."

Here she stops and blushes vividly, remembering that she is alluding to that of which one at least of her listeners knows nothing.

"Forgive me, Mr. Bulwer. I hardly know of what I am speaking. If you only knew what I suffer, you would feel for me."

"I do feel for you, Lady Valence, keenly. Dr. Newall will tell you that we were discussing this very subject, and the possibility of a cure, when you arrived."

"And what did you say?" she demands, turning to the old man.

"I could only repeat, my dear, what I have said to you before; this disease lies in the brain. Distract the earl's mind, disabuse his fancy, prove his imagination to have been a lie, and you will cure him—*perhaps*. Mind, I only say *perhaps*!"

"You think him *mad*?" she says, in a low voice.

"Not hereditarily so, my lady—not physically so, if I may use the expression. But that his abnormal studies have produced a temporary disturbance of the cerebral organization, I have no doubt. Nothing else could account for the earl's behaviour."

"*Mad!*" repeats Lady Valence, musingly. "*Mad!* good heavens! How horrible! And yet, had you seen him just now as he rushed into my arms, pale and trembling, his dear brow bathed in a cold perspiration, and heard the loud beating of his heart as he told me that the brief interval of happiness we have enjoyed was but a diabolical delusion to make the death to which he is hastening more terrible to contemplate, you would indeed have said that he looked mad. He clutched me—poor darling—as though a weak shaking thing as I am could be his support. And the pain in his eyes—the dreadful sense of pain stamped upon every line of his countenance—shall I ever forget it? It was this that made me come to you this evening, Dr. Newall; that made me feel that by some means or other an end must be put to this awful superstition. O, do not tell me that he is mad—that there is no hope for him!"

"Heaven forbid that I should say so, my dear lady. When I call the earl insane, I do so advisedly. The derangement would doubtless be but temporary, if the way of cure could be found. But how to find it, that's the question. How to find it!"

"I will find it—if it is to be found," she answers, grandly. "No! don't look at me

as if I were taking more on myself than I have any right to do. I have made a vow to Heaven that, if need be, I will sacrifice my life itself to cure my husband, and I mean to keep it. I know I am only a woman, and a very inexperienced and ignorant woman; but I love him, Mr. Bulwer, and I feel ready to defy all things, natural or supernatural, for his sake."

"God bless you! I believe you would!" cries the young man, as he looks at her with unqualified admiration; "and with the whole power of my strength I would assist you."

"Will you work with me?" she retorts, eagerly. "Shall we penetrate this haunted room together, and drag all its hidden mysteries to light?"

"I will follow you, if need be, to the jaws of death itself. What do you suppose I would *not* do in Valence's cause?—he who is my best and earliest friend!"

"If we could but argue him out of his belief in the reality of these apparitions—"

"If we could but prove to him, beyond a doubt, that they are but the creations of his own diseased imagination—"

"Stop, my children! not so fast!" interposes Dr. Newall. "You are reckoning without your host. Your proposals will not hold water. How can you reason a man out of the evidence of his own senses? Have you forgotten the midnight vigil you held with your husband, Lady Valence, and what you saw and heard during its continuance?"

Everil shudders and turns pale.

"Ah, no! How foolish I am! It is too real, too terrible a thing to be argued about. But what is to be done then? Will we always believe in and follow them?"

"To believe is not necessarily to follow, Lady Valence. I believe in the possibility of supernatural visitations, and yet they never trouble me. No! your husband's researches have gone too far for that. Were you and my impetuous young friend here to rush pellmell into the secret recesses of his heart, and strive to overthrow what is enshrined there as his most sacred belief, you would do no good whatever. You would only shock his sensibility, destroy his confidence in you, and leave him more closely wedded to his own opinions. His delusion is not that *such things are*. It lies in the trust he places in them, and their communications as being sent from heaven. If

we can once prove to him that spirits are fallible, that their prophecies can be false, and even their supposed identity a lie, the cure would be effected. Lord Valence would not have the witness of his own senses turned against himself, but he would learn how little in the way of spiritual revelation is worthy our attention beside that which has been committed in trust for us to the keeping of the church."

"But how can we do this, Dr. Newall?"

"I have been pondering the subject very carefully, and I can see but one way to it. When I have made you acquainted with the theory of my plan it will be for your ladyship to decide whether it is practical. Lord Valence fully believes he is to leave this world on the third of February, does he not?"

"On the third of February, at noon. And he constantly alludes to it, Dr. Newall, as a settled thing. Sometimes he wakes up suddenly in the night and thinks the time has come, and throws his arms about me to say farewell. And when I try to reason him out of the idea, he tells me it is of no use; that his fate has been determined since his birth, and that he feels the tide of life ebbing slower and slower with him every day. And, indeed, sometimes his pulse is scarcely perceptible. I cannot tell you how I tremble as the days go on."

"You must leave off trembling now, Lady Valence, like a brave woman, as I know you can be, and take to acting instead. By fair means or foul, your husband must be beguiled into passing over the third of February without noticing the date."

"But is that possible?"

"The possibility I leave to you. You have a woman's ready wit, and must bring it all to your assistance now. If you can persuade the earl by any means to live over the third of February without knowing it, his life is saved. He will see then the impotency of the prophecy in which he has placed so much trust, and I will guarantee his own good sense, which has been blinded by this infatuation, will prevent his ever placing faith in such revelations again."

"To make him pass over the third of February without noticing it," repeats the countess, thoughtfully; "but how to delude him? By what means to divert his observation?"

"You must work upon his feelings," replies the doctor, decidedly. "Bigoted as he is to this fatal belief, his lordship must surely possess some of the feelings of a man. There are a thousand things that should be able to distract his attention from himself; your health, for instance."

"O, that I could die for him!" she exclaims, suddenly.

"Valence would scarcely care to purchase his life at such a sacrifice," says Bulwer.

"Do you not think so? That thought would make it all the easier. But we must not talk, Mr. Bulwer! we must think—think—think! Dr. Newall's suggestion has been like a ray of light to me, and at all hazards I am resolved I will succeed."

"Depend upon my aid in any way that is in my power, Lady Valence, even to risking a rupture of the long-tried friendship between your husband and myself."

"As I would risk his love for me! O, I see we shall be true allies, Mr. Bulwer, and I thank you for it."

She holds out her delicate hand as she speaks, and permits him to clasp it firmly.

"Yet if we should fail!" she continues, breaking down, "if we should fail!"

The Joan of Arc spirit has departed again. She is once more a woman, and the two men hasten to exert their privilege of protection and consolation.

"We will not fail," says Bulwer, confidently. "Newall and I will put our heads together, Lady Valence, and take no rest until we have hit on some expedient that appears possible."

"And meanwhile, my dear young lady, you will consider too, and you will not forget to pray for our success; and between us three we are sure to find some way out of this apparent labyrinth of difficulty."

"The third of February, and this is the tenth of January! It is so short a time," she says, mournfully.

"No time is too short for God," is the old man's reply.

"Then I will go now, lest he should discover and be angry at my absence; and you two will consult together, and let me know everything in the morning. How can I thank you enough?" she says, sweetly, as she turns and smiles upon them through her tears.

"We will not take your thanks till we have earned them," replies Bulwer. "But

you must not return to the castle alone, Lady Valence. Let me see you through the grounds."

"No, I would rather not. Some one might see us, you know, and it would look so strange."

She says this half laughing, and touching the shawl she has wrapped about her head.

"I shall not be a minute running up to the castle. Good-night, Dr. Newall; you have done me all the good in the world; you have given me hope. I shall go home and pray that a way may be opened, and it *must* come—it *must* come!" And before they have time to reassure her, she has left the cottage and is running through the darkness in the direction of her home.

The castle hall and corridors are always lighted, but the place is so immense that the best of lamps leave it but gloomy. No one encounters Lady Valence as she steals up the wide staircase and into her own bedroom, where a light is dimly burning; but as she closes the door behind her, a figure starts up from the shadow of the dressing-room beyond, and advances towards her. It is her husband.

"Why, Valence, dearest," she says, cheerfully, "you here, and in the dark! What have you been doing? Are you not well?"

"What have you been doing? That's more to the purpose," he answers, almost roughly. "And where have you been? What makes your hair so untidy, and what is this shawl upon your arm? I want to know all that."

She stops for a moment confounded. To tell him she has been to Dr. Newall will be to rouse his worst suspicions and place him on his guard, and yet Everil is not the woman to tell a lie.

"I have been in the garden with this shawl about my head," she answers, with an attempt to speak lightly. "A stupid creature, am I not, to risk neuralgia and toothache, and every sort of ill, by braving the night air? But I was nervous, Valence, and excited, and I wanted to cool myself."

"Nervous and excited! Pray what excited you?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, dear love, you did. How can I help feeling nervous when you speak to me as you did this evening? Not only nervous, but miserable. You forget how my life is bound up in yours, Valence."

For a moment he seems about to relent, and submits to the caresses she showers upon him; but the next, a sudden remembrance strikes him, and he turns impatiently away.

"I see no reason why you should risk your health also. Did you go alone?"

"I went alone, Valence?"

"Did you come back alone?"

"Yes!"

"Did you see any one while you were out?"

"Why do you ask me? What can it signify?"

"Do you suppose it signifies nothing to me if you steal out in this surreptitious manner to meet any one or not? Do married ladies—hostesses—usually desert their guests to walk about their grounds after dark, with nothing but a shawl twisted about their heads, and with no object but to 'cool' themselves? Answer me, now! Was this walk an assignation or not?"

She has never seen him look like this before, nor heard him speak in such a voice of anger. His cheek is flushed, his eyes blazing; he has actually seized her by the arm; Everil's pride begins to stir.

"Of what do you accuse me?" she says, loftily.

"I accuse you of nothing; I only say that it is by a strange coincidence that you and Captain Maurice Stanton (the gentleman who gave you the flowers, you may remember) should have left the house at the same moment, and remained absent for the same time, and at such an hour as this, too strange, but true."

He throws away her hand and ceases speaking, as though waiting for a reply. But none comes. Everil remains silent.

"Well, madam?"

"What do you expect me to say?"

"I wish you to deny the accusation I bring against you—if you can! To tell me that you have not been walking about the garden to-night with that brute Stanton."

She is about indignantly to refute the assertion. She is about to cast her arms about her darling's neck, and entreat him to tell her who has dared to poison his mind with such an infamous falsehood concerning her faith to him, when a thought occurs to her; a voice commences ringing in her ears, "*Work on his feelings. Bigoted as he is to this fatal belief, his lordship must surely possess some of the feelings*

of a man. There are a thousand things should be able to distract his attention from himself."

Is this one of them? Everil pauses, considers, trembles, and remains voiceless and impassive.

"You don't deny it?" continues the earl, in a low tone, full of agitation. "You are silent, when a word from you would put an end to all my suspicions. I have watched that man closely, and I am not deceived; he cares for you! Heavens! what will you make me believe next?"

"You must believe what you choose, Valence," she answers, in a trembling voice—the voice of the martyr who has the stake in view, yet walks up boldly to it—"I decline to refute the accusation you bring against me."

"You refuse to satisfy my doubts! Is it wounded pride or *guilt* that keeps you silent, Everil?"

"You can attribute it to the motive you prefer."

"Good heavens! that I should live to hear you speak to me like that! Do you know what you are doing? Do you know that you are causing the most violent emotion of which my nature is capable, and that I cannot answer for the consequences that may follow such an act? I told you the other day, and I repeat it now, that if you once give me cause for jealousy, you will raise a demon you will find it difficult to quell. And yet you can stand there quietly, and tell me you decline to refute the accusation brought against you!"

"No law, social or religious, compels us to refute an unjust charge."

"You allow it is unjust then?"

"I allow nothing! I consider that I am authorized in taking a walk through my own grounds, if I so choose, at any hour of the day or night, and I deny the right of you or any one to question so simple a proceeding."

"I do not condemn the fact of the walk, though it was imprudent. I demand only to know if you were accompanied by any one."

"And I refuse to say."

He looks at her for a moment without speaking; then, with a face white with mingled anger and pain, he rushes from the apartment.

Lady Valence waits until the sound of his receding footsteps has died away before

she ventures to lock her door and give vent to her real feelings. Then sinking down on her knees by the bedside, she buries her face in the yielding drapery, and groans in the anguish of her spirit.

"Can I do it? Can I go through with it? Shall I live to see the completion of so terrible a task? Yet for his sake—for his sake! That thought must be my watch-word, even if I die."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"APPEARANCES ARE DECEITFUL."

No immediate consequences follow this outburst from the earl. The countess comes down smiling to the breakfast-table the following morning; the business of the day proceeds as usual, and if Valence's brow is a little overclouded, and his manner curt and undecided, his words are too changeable to excite much observation, and no one appears the wiser for the scene which took place in the bedroom the night before. How constantly it is the case in this world! Captain Spooney is so attentive to his wife, so anxious to anticipate her wishes, so particular in calling her by names of endearment in public, that his acquaintance would not believe it possible that whenever the captain's temper has been ruffled he vents his ill-humor by pinching Mrs. Spooney, and knocking her about, and wreaking his petty malice by a thousand contemptible denials of her food, or her money, or her pleasure. Pretty languid Mrs. Butterfly, too, who always speaks to her husband as "my dearest love," and appears periodically with her hair or her dress arranged in the most unbecoming style because "dear Edward" prefers it in that fashion, how astonished the guileless and uninitiated are when she walks on one fine summer's morning with Lieutenant Prancer, of the cavalry, and to find subsequently, when they appear in print, that the unsuspecting lieutenant is but the tail of a long list of co-respondents.

The world is not an innocent creature, by any manner of means; yet the world is certainly very easily beguiled by appearances, or, rather, we should say, the world shuts its eyes determinately to that which should not be. Perhaps in the laudable desire to do as it would be done by.

It is content to take things as they ap-

pear, which is, after all, the least troublesome method to pursue. The guests at Castle Valence are content to take their host and hostess as they appear, at all events for a day or two. But after that time the change becomes more visible. The earl's usually languid and apathetic manner has given place to a restless anxiety, which seems to render him incapable of keeping quiet. His eyes are always watching the countess; his cheeks burn with a hectic flush; he appears to be inwardly consumed by some devouring fever. Everil, on the contrary, grows apparently livelier day by day. Her laugh is oftener heard than it has ever been before; it is certainly harsher and louder than it used to be; but that may arise from her high spirits. She does not appear to take any notice of the earl's changed demeanor, nor even of himself; but much affects the society of Alice Mildmay, with whom she has secret jokes that are confided to none of the rest of the company, unless it be to Maurice Staunton, who has a faculty of hanging about these two ladies, and holding whispered conversations with them, that is, on occasions when by so doing they cannot offend society.

Mr. Mildmay, who never liked Captain Staunton in the olden days, and has conceived an honest affection for his intended son-in-law, John Bulwer, watches the triumvirate with eyes of suspicion. He is not pleased at Captain Staunton's increased familiarity with his hostess; still less with his apparent intimacy with his daughter. He does not like to mention the subject to Bulwer, lest he should be the means of rousing his suspicious unnecessarily; but he unbosoms himself freely to Miss Strong, who is as cognizant of the evil as he is.

"I am an old-fashioned individual, and I may hold very antiquated notions," he says to her one day, after a luncheon, during which Everil and Alice have appeared to be entirely engrossed by Maurice Staunton's attentions; and the earl has left the table abruptly, and without apparent cause; "but I don't like the way in which these young people go on, Miss Strong. Everil was always willful and headstrong—you and I know that to our cost; yet I used to think her heart was in the right place, and she knew what was due to herself as a gentlewoman; but to see the manner in which

she permitted that young Staunton to go on with her to-day at the luncheon-table, it was romping, madam, positively romping; there's no other name for it. I don't wonder the earl was annoyed. Why Captain Staunton was ever asked down here, I cannot imagine. There are circumstances in the past connected with his name which should, I think, have prevented Everil from allowing him to become her guest; and to have my daughter mixed up with it all! It disturbs me greatly."

"O, pray don't speak of it so seriously, Mr. Mildmay, or you will alarm me. I was as surprised as you could be to find Captain Staunton here; but dear Everil assures me he was invited by her husband, and not herself. So what could the poor child do but submit?"

"Submit! Pooh! nonsense! It's one thing to have the man staying in the castle—though I question that as a sign of good taste—and another to flirt with him openly as she is doing now. No one could help observing it, Miss Strong! I call it scandalous, and I won't have Alice's name dragged into any such affair. If John Bulwer won't interfere, I shall."

"Would it not be better to speak to Alice yourself? To mention the subject to Mr. Bulwer will be to create an open scandal. You cannot speak of Alice without inculpating Lady Valence."

"Yes, you are right. And your duty, Miss Strong, is to speak to the countess."

"To Everil! O Mr. Mildmay, you do not know the task you are setting me! You may remember how ill she bore coercion even in her schoolgirl's days. What will she say if I venture to reprove her now, when I have no possible right to do so?"

"You have the right of old acquaintance and long-tried affection. You have the right of right, which should be the strongest right of all. Speak to her plainly, Miss Strong; no half measures ever took with that girl. Ask her what Staunton is doing here; let her what people are saying about it; urge the interests of her husband, her position and herself, upon her; and let her do her worst afterwards if she will. Your duty is clear before you."

"If you think I ought, I will, Mr. Mildmay; but it seems taking a great deal upon myself."

He draws her to the window, and points

across the leafless park, where, in the distance, two figures saunter close together. They are not so far off but that she can distinguish them to be the countess and Captain Maurice Staunton.

"Look at that, and don't talk such nonsense!" he says, sternly. "You might as well say it was taking too much upon yourself to drag a would-be suicide back from the brink of the grave."

"And when we first came here she seemed so devoted to her husband!" says Miss Strong, mournfully.

"Appearances are deceitful," replies the rector, just as Mrs. West, muffled up to the chin in sables, with Arthur, arrayed in black velvet, by her side, comes tripping into the room.

"Where is dear Everil?" she inquires, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Walking in the park with Captain Staunton," growls Mr. Mildmay. "She appears partial to the company of that young man, Mrs. West."

"O, it is so good of her, isn't it, when I know she would rather be in a dozen other places? But that is just like dear Everil! She is always sacrificing herself for other people. I say she is a perfect martyr."

"It's a pity she confines her martyrdom so exclusively to one person, though. It would not be the less martyrdom for being divided occasionally; at least, that's my opinion."

"Do you mean Maurice by 'one person'?" Does Everil martyrize herself oftener for him than her other guests? I'm so glad to hear it! She used to snub him dreadfully (he's not much of a favorite with her, you know), and he felt it very much. It is kind of her to walk with the poor fellow. He will be so proud of her condescension. I really must thank Everil, for Maurice is my guest. You know dear Lady Russell and I are such bosom friends."

"Don't you think you could take Captain Staunton off Lady Valence's hands occasionally; then?" puts in Miss Strong, bravely. "The earl seemed rather put out at luncheon to-day because she could talk to no one else."

"Has Valence been confiding his private annoyances to you?" exclaims Agatha, with wide-open eyes.

"O no! of course not. The earl and I are not on such intimate terms; only I thought—it was impossible not to observe—"

But here the old lady's eloquence is interrupted by Mrs. West's merry laugh.

"Dear, dear! How comical! I only wish dear Valence could hear you. What would he say?"

"I should be very much concerned if any remark I made to you in confidence did reach his lordship's ears," stammers Miss Strong, with a heightened color.

"My dear creature! I wouldn't be the one to repeat it for the world. Why, he would bring the whole castle down about our ears. Everil and he are the most absurd pair of turtle-doves you ever came across in the whole course of your existence. They are always billing and cooing, and going on with their lovers' nonsense. And the idea of any one taking a story to Valence *against* his wife! Why, he'd kill the messenger! That's my belief."

"I'm so glad to hear it!" quoth the duenna, with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"The idea of your dreaming otherwise! I never heard such an absurd idea! Come, Arthur, we will go for a walk, and meet these two arch-plotters on their way home. Auntie Everil will thank me greatly for exchanging cavaliers; and I'm not sure that I shall object to the arrangement, either."

"Do you hear that?" says Miss Strong, as the little widow and her child disappear.

"Yes, I hear it; but I shall speak to Alice all the same."

"But now I come to think of it, Mr. Mildmay, I did hear a rumor, before I came to the castle, that Mrs. West and Captain Staunton were going to make a match of it; in which case he would become a sort of brother-in-law to our dear Everil. Don't you think we have been rather premature in our suspicions?"

"Perhaps so. I hope we may have; but I shall speak to my Alice, nevertheless," repeats the rector, with the dogged obstinacy inherent in his sex; "and if you know your duty, you will do the same by Everil."

"O yes, I certainly will speak to her," replies Miss Strong, reserving to herself the right of judgment as to what she shall speak about. The old lady is not timid, but she has no notion of burning her fingers before she knows what may be in the pile—an excellent feeling of caution, for which many of us would be happier if our well-meaning but impertinent friends occasionally exercised it on our behalf.

* * * * *

"You must be more cautious. The rat is beginning to make himself apparent to the senses of the household," says Agatha West, in a whisper, to Maurice Staunton, as she meets him in the centre of one of the long corridors.

"In what way?"

"Old Mildmay and old Strong have been pumping me this afternoon. They evidently think your attentions too particular. They even went the length of hinting that Valence is annoyed by them; but I think I put that idea out of their venerable heads."

"What did you say?"

"Made out that Everil and Valence are the most devoted of lovers, and that if you had a penchant for any one, it was my unworthy self. And I really think you must make a little love to me occasionally, my dear boy, just to keep up appearances, at any rate in their presence—unpleasant, I dare say, but useful—and a hint to Everil will set her mind at rest upon the matter. Not that she appears as though she required much conviction of the truth. I almost think, myself, sometimes, that she is rather too open in showing her preference for you. How is it all going on?"

"Famously! I had no idea she would come round so soon; she has been so cold and reserved towards me since her marriage—until now."

"O, that was all fudge—just put on for the sake of appearances. I told you so long ago. Why, she was desperately in love with you, Staunton; and, for all that is said against the sex, women don't forget quite so easily as that. When you threw the poor girl over, I thought she would have gone mad."

"Don't use that horrid term, 'threw her over.' You know the absolute necessity there was for my conduct on that occasion, and how we mutually agreed that the only thing to look forward to was—*this that is coming*."

"True! And it seems to be coming fast enough, doesn't it? I never saw Valence look so awfully ill as he does at present. Only, for Heaven's sake, be careful! There is such a thing as going too far. You do not want the mine sprung before it's time, do you?"

"How do you mean?"

"What are you working for?—the hand of the widowed Countess of Valence, or—"

"You need not finish your sentence. I know what you would say. You may scarcely believe me, Mrs. West, when I reply that I am working only to obtain the woman whom I love—"

"Good heavens! Wonders will never cease! But you know the bulk of her property is settled on herself?"

"I don't think it would make any difference to me now if it were not. I always cared for her. Time-serving as you give me credit for being, you will not deny that; and since she has been the Countess of Valence, and treated me with such superb disdain, my passion has become almost a madness. With money, or without money, at all costs, I am resolved to win her, if only to have my revenge for the disappointment she has caused me."

"Well, you seem to be in a very fair way of accomplishing your ambition, so you need not talk so loudly as to apprise the whole castle of your intentions. To tell you the truth, the change in Everil's behaviour towards you has amazed me; for I really thought she was beginning to care for her husband."

"Ha! ha! ha! Poor Valence! Well, he would not enjoy her preference very long, at any rate, would he? Do you think he suspects anything?"

"I cannot say; he has not mentioned the subject to myself. But he is entirely absorbed in his own prospects, and has little time to speculate on those of other people. Besides, it was not a love-match on his side either, remember."

"Rush! Some one is coming up the staircase."

"*N'importe!* The more you and I are seen together the better, Staunton; it diverts suspicion. I have but one word more to say to you, however. Be cautious! The end cannot be far off now; and it's no use making an *exclusion* in the family for nothing."

"I will try; but I confess fate is becoming too much for me, and things must take their course. Good-by. We shall meet again at dinner."

He moves off in the opposite direction just as Mr. Mildmay comes tolling to the head of the staircase. Agatha affects to be much confused as he confronts her.

"Now, Mr. Mildmay, I call this shameful of you!" she says, with the giggle of a schoolgirl; "coming up in the stairs in

that stealthy way. I vow we should have an act of Parliament passed to prohibit gentlemen from wearing velvet slippers in the house; they are altogether too dangerous."

"I hope your deeds will bear the light, Mrs. West," he answers, jocosely.

"O dear! I trust so; but still there are moments—I hope you didn't see who went down the other staircase, Mr. Mildmay!"

"It was Captain Staunton, was it not?"

"O you dreadful old man! What eyes you have! I cannot stand being looked at in that fashion. I shall run away at once to hide my blushes." And, suiting the action to the word, away trips the pretty cat to her own apartment. As she reaches it her face changes.

"What on earth does Maurice intend to do?" she thinks to herself, with knitted brows; "and Everil, too? She can never be so mad as to contemplate anything more imprudent than an indecorously early abandonment of her widow's weeds. Valence will die childless. The greater amount of her money is tied up on herself. What advantages will precipitation bring them?"

The little widow, who has spent her life in plotting and planning, is for once puzzled. She cannot understand the tactics of her friends, but she knows it is not her interest to circumvent them.

"Whatever happens," she muses, "nothing can prevent poor Valence's death, and my darling child's accession to the title. Thank Heaven for that!"

And the woman really does thank Heaven as she says the words. Were you to take a knife and place it in her hands, and tell her she might just as well thrust it in the earl's heart as follow the course she is pursuing with him, she would be infinitely shocked at your proposal; but she has so long contemplated his death as a fact of which the moment alone is wrapped in uncertainty; she has acted the part she acts towards him for so many months, that it has become an integral portion of her nature; and she does not appear less womanly, and benevolent, and truthful to herself than any other person who spends his existence working for a certain end in which all his hopes are centred. There have been such cases of moral self-deception before now. There are women (women far more frequently deceive themselves than men)

who go on lying day after day, till their views of right and wrong get so distorted that they actually do not know when they are speaking the truth or not. It may be supposed also that some of these wretched murderers (like Charlotte Windsor for instance) ply their hellish trade until the smothering of an infant more or less makes no great difference in their habitual slumbers; and most assuredly repeated crime, and even the repeated contemplation of crime, blunts our sensibility and deadens the warnings of our conscience to that extent that we become unfitted to judge of the enormity of sin, and of the effect it has upon our own souls and those of others.

Agatha West is in this condition. Little by little she has accustomed herself to think of and hanker after forbidden things, until no step appears to her too bold to hazard in the attainment of her object, and she can even view that saddest of all sights, a fellow-creature pulled down to the depths of iniquity, with calmness, so long as the action tends to bring about the fulfilment of her own ambition.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THANK GOD! IT WILL BE SOON OVER."

A LITTLE while longer and rumor and suspicion are resolved into certainty; there is no doubt at all that the earl and countess are no longer upon friendly terms with one another.

The very look of misery they both present (Valence continually, although he tries to hide it by a haughty bearing which but renders the fact more sadly palpable, and Everil by an apparently heartless gaiety), convinces the spectators of the truth of their belief.

Lord and Lady Valence do not often speak to one another before their guests, but when they do their words are of the coldest, and sometimes worse than cold. This is especially the case on one particular morning, when the subject of balls is introduced at breakfast, and Captain Staunton confesses his love for dancing, and reminds his hostess of the many pleasant evenings they have passed in that pursuit together.

"Do you suppose I have forgotten them," she utters, plaintively, "and when they were the last opportunities I had for such enjoyment? I have never danced once since my marriage."

"You don't mean to tell me so!"
"How could I? Haven't I been shut up in this dull old castle ever since, with hardly a neighbor within ten miles of me? If some of my old friends had not occasionally taken compassion on me, as you are doing now, I believe I should have died of sheer ennui."

Mr. Mildmay looks across the table at her with a frown.

"What an absurd speech to hear proceeding from the mouth of a young lady who has health, and strength, and horses, and carriages, and every luxury that the heart of man could wish, or his brain invent?"

"But, papa, a woman wants something at times besides the company of dogs and horses," interposes Alice.

"Hold your tongue, miss! I didn't speak to you."

"A married lady," observes Miss Strong, "should always have sufficient society in the presence of her husband."

"How can you tell, Miss Strong?" exclaims Alice, laughing. "You've never tried it."

"For which you may reply, 'Thank Heaven!'" responds Lady Valence, sarcastically.

"To return to the subject we were discussing," says Maurice Staunton, in his bland voice. "You have never thought of giving a ball here, I suppose, Lady Valence?"

"No! Who would come to it?"

"Everybody, I should imagine, who lives within a reasonable distance. They would be only too glad. You really should have given a house-warming."

"We have never been accustomed to give balls at Castle Valence," says the earl, coldly.

"That is no reason why we should not begin," retorts his wife.

"I consider it is every reason. I should not care to have a ball here, especially now, when my health is so indifferent. I could not stand it."

"But I could, and you would not be called upon to take any trouble in the business. Captain Staunton, I think yours is a brilliant idea. I am quite excited about it. I wonder how soon one could contrive to get it up."

"It would not take long, with your train of servants. The invitations are the chief things to think about."

"Lady Valence, I beg you will proceed no further with this idea. You are only wasting your time. The ball will not be given."

"We will see about that," she answers, coolly. "Don't you think a fortnight's invitation will be long enough, Captain Staunton—for the country, you know?"

Lord Valence has been set at defiance. He will not argue the point further before his guests, but, rising from the table, he murmurs some indistinct words of apology, and hastily leaves the room. Everil's head is not even turned to learn the cause of his disappearance.

The rest of the company look at one another in disapproval, and are silent and uncomfortable. Two or three tears course slowly down the bridge of Miss Strong's nose and drop on to the plate. Mr. Mildmay, grunting dissatisfaction, rises and follows the earl's example. Agatha West crosses the room to Everil's side, and stands between her and Staunton, with a hand on the shoulder of each.

"You naughty children! You have quite vexed poor Valence with your foolish talk. Don't you see that he has left the room?"

"Foolish talk, do you call it? Wait till you see my ball, Agatha. I mean it to be the best that has ever been given in Wicklow."

"You goose! You don't really mean to give one."

"Don't I? Come with me to my boudoir, and help me with the invitations. I shall send them all out to-day, and fix it for the second of February. That will just give the women time enough to get their dresses ready."

"The second of February! Valence will not be well enough to attend it, will he, Everil?"

The countess stops suddenly, and presses her hand to her heart.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing—nothing! Only a sudden stab. Indigestion, I'm afraid. I haven't had enough exercise lately. Never mind! dancing will take it down. What were you saying, Agatha?"

"That I'm afraid dear Valence won't be strong enough for dancing, or anything of that sort."

"Well, he won't grudge us our pleasure, I suppose, even if he can't take part in it.

At any rate, he will be able to look on. Where had we better dance, Captain Staunton—in the music-room or the saloon?"

And thereupon they fall to discussing ways and means in a manner that makes Miss Strong, remembering the despairing face with which the young earl has just quitted them, feel quite sick.

She has not yet fulfilled the promise she made to Mr. Mildmay of speaking to her old pupil about her conduct with Captain Staunton. She has lacked courage to put her good intentions into effect; but the occurrence at the breakfast-table this morning nerves her for the task.

"Everil, my dear, may I speak to you?" she says in her old deferential style, as she looks into the countess's boudoir a few hours later, and detects her seated at a writing-table covered with note-paper and envelopes.

"To be sure, Miss Strong. Pray come in."

The old lady closes the door carefully behind her, and advancing slowly, seats herself with a deep sigh close to Lady Valence.

"My dear girl (you will let me call you so, I know, for the sake of old times), I have a very painful task before me. I know I have lost all right to question your actions, Everil; but—but—"

"I am quite aware of what you are going to say, Miss Strong," replies the countess, as she begins to make inky dots all over the paper to cover her nervousness; "and I wish you wouldn't say it. It will be of no use."

"O my dear child, don't say that! I thought it was all so different. But you have many blessings left, Everil, even if—if—your relations with his lordship are not all that you anticipated—and— Don't go against him in this matter, my dear—don't give a ball since he objects to it."

"But why should he object to it?"

"The why and the wherefore are of no consequence; that he does so should be sufficient."

"I don't see the matter in that light."

"I did not think you would be so headstrong, particularly at such a moment."

"At what moment?"

"When your husband is so ill. Nay, my dear, why should you start? Does the earl not say so himself? and cannot every one who knows him see how visibly he has retrograded lately?"

"You think so?" exclaims the countess, as she seizes Miss Strong by the arm.

"My dear, you *must* see it for yourself. It is too palpable. He is losing flesh, and strength, and vigor every day. I know Dr. Newall thinks very badly of him; and Mr. Mildmay said just now that he should not be surprised if Lord Valence did not live to see this ball on which your heart appears so greatly set. Hush, hush! my love! I did not mean to distress you like this" (for the countess has cast herself across the writing-table, and is weeping loudly). "Pray be calm. It may be a mistake, you know. We are all in the hands of God—only, if you would consent to humor his lordship in this little matter—"

But Lady Valence has dried her tears as suddenly as they appeared, and is once more sitting before her desk, calm and resolute.

"You must not ask me to revoke my decision, Miss Strong. I have passed my word there shall be a ball here, and a ball there shall be. With regard to Lord Valence's health, that is, as you remarked, in higher hands than ours, and it is impossible for us to say what will or will not be. Should he continue as he is now, I am sure he will very much enjoy this little festivity; if not, we must make the best of it. I am not offended with you, my dear old friend; but if you have nothing more to say to me than this, I am rather busy just at present, and would like to be left alone."

"And you will not listen to me, Everil?" says Miss Strong, as she rises from her seat.

"I will not give up my ball, you old tyrant, if that is what you mean—not for all your coaxing, nor for Guardy's growls; and so you may tell him. And now I shall just run you right out of my room, and lock the door upon you."

And, suiting the action to the word, the duenna soon finds herself in the corridor again, whilst the countess, with clenched teeth and trembling hands, turns the key in the door. She listens anxiously till Miss Strong's footsteps are heard to descend the staircase, and then she flings herself upon the sofa in an abandonment of grief.

"O my heart!—my heart!" she gasps, as she holds both hands tightly clasped above it. "O God! my heart!"

She sobs distractedly for a few moments, and then begins to moan.

"Where is he? Where is my Valence?"

O, I must see him, and put an end to this horrible deception, or I shall die."

She rises with a sudden unconquerable longing, and, all disordered as she is, with her blurred swollen features and bloodshot eyes, rushes headlong into the passage towards her husband's dressing-room. He is not there.

She descends the staircase to the library, and knocks. There is no answer.

She pushes the door open and enters the apartment.

A large fire is burning in the grate; on a sofa beside it is stretched the figure of Lord Valence, inanimate, as if in sleep.

She creeps softly to his side. His white careworn features look deathlike in repose; his wasted hands are crossed upon his breast; his sad eyes are wide open—staring—fixed upon the opposite wall.

She knows what it is now that holds him. This is not sleep. She has seen him under this fatal influence before. He is in a trance.

With the sight all the woman's resolutions to save him at any cost return:

Here lies her husband—the life of her life—chained by an invisible power that robs him of all his senses and leaves him as one dead; and here is she, living and active, and with all hers pledged to rescue him, if possible, from the thrall by which he is enchained. In a moment the feeling of weakness that brought her to that library has passed; she is once more ready to sacrifice herself, and all that she holds most dear, for his sake; and she kneels down by his side and renews the vow.

Very tenderly she passes her arm beneath his head and places it upon her bosom; then, with her warm lips pressed to his unconscious mouth, she calls Heaven to witness she will be faithful to her resolution:

"My love!" she whispers as she kisses his thin hands, which are locked together rigid as sculptured marble; "my own dear love! I will die for you, or with you. And then, in that other world, for striving to look into which we shall both have paid so dearly, you will read all my motives, and my hope, and my affection, and not judge me too harshly for the dubious paths by which I strove to attain my end."

She lays his head again upon the sofa-cushion, and, rising, leaves the apartment as quietly as she entered it. On the threshold she turns and looks back upon him.

"If he only knew," she murmurs, with streaming eyes—"but he will never know until his spirit is entirely free—how much I love him! I have no words in which to tell it him. I can only give him everything that I possess—even to his own esteem—and trust the means will be forgiven for the end."

And when Lord Valence recovers his senses the library is still and empty; but from the further end of the vast hall, where his wife and Alice Mildmay are playing battledore and shuttlecock with Maurice Staunton and John Bulwer, comes the sound of merry voices, which recalls him entirely to himself. He rises slowly, with a confused consciousness of what has befallen him, and unlocks his stiffened hands. As they touch one another he feels that they are wet, and raises them to his eyes with surprise.

Yes, he is not mistaken. His hands are wet; wet, as though with tears.

"Can spirits weep?" he thinks sadly as he regards them. "I think not; yet, were it possible, I am a sight they might well weep over."

At that moment another merry peal of laughter comes ringing from the hall.

Lord Valence hears it, and sighs.

"Thank God, it will soon be over!" he says, as he throws himself face downward on the sofa-cushion again. "Thank God!—thank God!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I WILL GO THROUGH WITH IT TO THE
END."

A FORTNIGHT later, and Castle Valence is lighted up as for a great festivity. No one, to see the old place now, would think that its young master was fast dying. Yet such is the case. Lights flash from every window; the moat and drawbridge are illuminated by colored lamps, the halls and staircases have been transformed into temporary hothouses; the ballroom is almost as full as it can hold of diaphanous dresses and tail-coats; yet Lord Valence lies on the library sofa gasping for every breath he draws. He is in no pain; he is in no fear; he says he wants for nothing; but he lies there, growing weaker every minute, and counting the hours till the moment shall arrive to set him free. Dr. Newall has been to see him, and they have a long and

interesting conversation together; but the doctor can do him no good, and he has gone home again, with a promise to return later in the evening. Indeed, his intention is—though this he keeps to himself—to pass the night at the castle.

Lord Valence's personal attendant is moving noiselessly about the apartment, but his restlessness disturbs his master, and he tells him to leave the room.

"But should your lordship require anything—"

"I can ring for you, Johnson. But I want for nothing, thank you—nothing, except rest."

"Which you would get better in bed, dear Valence, surely, than lying on the sofa."

"Agatha! You here! What does this mean?"

"My dear Valence, do you suppose I could go and jump about at a ball whilst you are so ill? I have put on a ball dress in order to keep Everil in countenance, but I never intended to join the dancers. On this day, too, of all days in the year. What do you think I am made of?"

"It is very kind of you. It is like yourself. But what good can you do by the sacrifice? Better leave me to my silent communion with those who wait for me to accompany me hence."

"O Valence! do not speak in this manner. I cannot believe it even yet."

"You will believe it to-morrow—at noon. All my cares and troubles will be over then. O Agatha! I could die easily if it were not for one thought."

"Which thought, dear Valence?"

"That I leave her to him! If he had only been some man I liked and trusted—Bulwer, for instance—I could have borne my own disappointment bravely; but he will make her wretched, Agatha. He will break the poor girl's heart."

"And serve her right, too! No, Valence, I must speak out. Everil has behaved shamefully to you. She is not worthy of a thought."

"Hush! you must not say that, even now! I have had a fearful blow, Agatha! I made so sure (I suppose it grew out of my own vanity and self-deception), but I made so sure that she had begun to love me! She told me so, you know; otherwise I should not have presumed to believe it."

"And yet Isola has always spoken the truth about her."

"I see that now, but it was so sweet—so very sweet—to think she cared for me! For I love her, Agatha; I love her with my whole heart and soul."

"What, still?"

"Still! I should not be able to help loving her if she cursed me to my face. And she has never done that, poor child; she has never done that! She has only gone back to the old love, as you now tell me he is."

"On her authority remember, Valence. Had I known it at the time of your marriage, I should of course have told you."

"Never mind that now. It is nearly past and done with. She has her own money, and I hope she will be happy. And for the rest, for my poor little fortune, that must go with the title to your child. May he prove a better Earl of Valence than I have done—"

"O my dear brother," says the widow, weeping. "However Everil could be so base—"

"Hush! here is Bulwer! Well, old chum! have you cut the dancing too, like my good sister here, in order to sit with a dull fellow like me?"

"I never went in much for that kind of thing, you know, Valence, and should not have joined them at all except to please Alice, Mrs. West! if you will permit me I will take your place now for a little while, and you can go and see how the ball gets on."

"O! don't talk of balls to me, Mr. Bulwer. The very thought of it makes me sick. Yet, if you wish to talk to dear Valence—"

"I think it would be as well that Lady Valence had your presence, Mrs. West."

"Yes! go to Everil," pleads the earl. "She is so young, so lovely. Don't let people talk about her. There will be time enough for that afterwards—afterwards."

"An excellent woman," he continues as Agatha sidles out of the library; "a good mother and a good friend. What should I have done without her, Bulwer?"

"Humph!" ejaculates Bulwer, shortly.

"I know you never liked her, but I think you have misjudged her, Bulwer. She has been faithful to me, you see, to the last."

"Exactly so?"

"The subject does not please you. We

will turn to another, Bulwer. I am so glad to have these few moments of quiet conversation. I wanted to speak to you, to ask you to befriend Lady Valence when I am gone."

"Will she need my friendship?"

"I am afraid so. I distrust that man."

"What man?"

"Maurice Staunton! Cannot you see there is a secret understanding between them? Do you not foresee what will happen when I, the obstacle to their happiness, am removed?"

"You must be mistaken!" cries Bulwer; "this is the madness of jealousy, Valence."

But this remark only makes the earl eager to prove his assertion.

"I tell you, Bulwer, it is the case. She told me long ago, poor child, that she had had a previous attachment, though she mentioned no name; and I remember now how averse she was to Staunton becoming domiciled here. But I thought it was Agatha whom he came after."

"And how do you know now that it is not Mrs. West?"

"I know it on her own assertion (poor Agatha! it must be a disappointment to her too, for I think she liked the man), and from Everil's conduct. Is not her preference for him patent to the world? Has not this very ball been given at his instigation, though I am dying?"

"I certainly have observed that they are very friendly with each other; but more than that I could not believe; that is," continues Bulwer, correcting himself, "unless I saw it with my own eyes."

"I will show it you, then," says the earl, with feverish impatience, as he rises from his couch; "we will go into the music saloon, and watch the promenaders from behind the flowers. You shall see how she can look at that man when she thinks my gaze is not upon her."

"Valence! you are quite unfit to go through the corridors."

"I am determined to go. Hark! They are dancing now. The way is clear! If we meet anybody it will be thought I am on my way to my bedroom."

He stands on his feet as he speaks, and, trembling with weakness and emotion, places one burning hand on Bulwer's arm and draws him from the library.

The music-saloon juts upon the ballroom. It is filled with couches for the convenience

of the tired dancers, and potted shrubs, behind one of which the men ensconce themselves in shadow.

They have not to wait there long. Even as they take their places, two figures come sauntering from the further end, and stand together just in front of them, conversing.

"How beautiful you look to-night, my dearest," exclaims the man. "This is the first opportunity I have had of telling you so. You will not retract your promise, Everill? You will not fail me?"

"I will go through with it to the end," she answers, firmly.

"I was sure you would! You are not a woman to take back your plighted word. How can I thank you sufficiently?"

"Do not thank me at all—till afterwards."

"Afterwards my whole life will be dedicated to your service. How short-sighted we are! Did we ever think things would turn out as they have done?"

"Hush! I heard a rustle near that screen; come down to the other end of the saloon."

They move slowly away, walking a little apart, but as they gain the further end, he places his hand familiarly upon her arm, and she—she permits it.

Valence gives a deep groan and turns away.

"Come back to the library, Bulwer, for God's sake!" he says in a faint voice of pain.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"WHAT MAKES HER SO FIDGETY TO-NIGHT?"

THE earl, with the assistance of his friend, reaches his own apartment, and sinks back exhausted on the sofa, helpless as a child.

"I have but one wish left," he utters brokenly, "to hear the hour strike that shall see my life ended, Bulwer."

"Valence! this is a case in which you should act, not weep. Try and rouse yourself. Assert your authority as master of the castle, and turn the man who presumes to insult you through your wife from its doors."

"What good could I do by it?"

"All the good in the world. Show your own independence, and earn the admiration of your wife. All women love power when it is justly wielded."

"Gain her admiration by outraging her modesty—and for how long, Bulwer? You forget to-morrow will be the third of February."

"And what then? You do not place any real credit in that absurd prophecy, do you?"

"Each passing moment convinces me still further it is true. No! Bulwer! the time is too near at hand. Let me die—not in peace—but at all events with the knowledge I have not made her miserable. Were Everil in real danger I might risk her anger, but by this time to-morrow she will be free to love whom she chooses."

"And you would not stretch out your little finger, I suppose, to save her from destruction?"

"What do you mean?" cries the earl, starting into a sitting posture.

"Suppose she were to elope with that man to-night, what then?"

"God! are you saying this only to torture me, or do you know anything—suspect anything?"

"I know nothing but what you have shown me, but surely that is enough."

"Do you mean to insinuate that my Everil could—that it would be possible? O

no, O no! She is young and thoughtless—and by the very fact of marrying her I have thrown her into the way of temptation—but she is too pure, too good, too honorable. I would rather die than suspect her of such baseness."

"*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui compte*, and Lady Valence appears, at any rate, to have begun well."

"Bulwer, you do her an injustice! Her first lover, the only man she ever cared for—God help me!—is near her, and dishonorable enough to whisper love into her ear. The poor child were less than a woman could she refuse even to listen. But more than this Everil would never do. I would stake my life upon it. Even now her pure heart may be reproaching her for having listened. But if I thought that he had *dared*—" and Lord Valence's hands are clenched tightly together as he says the word.

"To suggest something more than listening to her ladyship, you mean. What would you do in that case, Valence?"

"I would tear his false tongue out of his mouth! I would place my heel upon his face, and grind it into powder!"

"What, in your present condition?"

"Heaven would lend me the strength. The knowledge that my darling's mind was being corrupted—that all through her long life, though released from my presence, she would bear the scourge of an accusing conscience that would not permit her even to meet me in the other world with unabashed eyes—would imbue me with a false capacity for exertion. In that hour, Bulwer, I should be stronger than the strongest man that was ever born, even if I died the moment after I had pulverized my enemy and hers to dust."

"Notwithstanding the prophecy."

"Ah! that prophecy! What signifies our talking when I shall not live, perhaps, to look upon my darling's face again?"

"I will call her to you if you wish it."

"No, no! She is happy! Let her remain so now. Only—to-morrow, should she be sleeping towards noon, Bulwer, rouse her just for one moment, that my

last sweet impression of this world may be the features of her lovely face."

"You are quite sure you shall go at noon?"

"Quite sure! Who should know better than those who have been commissioned to conduct my spirit from this world to the next?"

"And you have no doubt whatever of the trustworthiness of your spiritual messengers? You do not suppose it possible they could be mistaken?"

"If I once found what they told me to be untrue, the whole fabric of my belief in them as guardian spirits would crumble to the ground."

"I am glad of that," remarks Bulwer, dryly.

"That they are spirits, and that the communications I receive through my own hand and hearing are due to some influence ulterior to my senses, no power on earth could make me disbelieve; but there are, of course, different grades of creatures in those spheres as in this, and false messages and prophecies could only come through the mouths of lying or evil spirits. It would give me infinite pain, Bulwer, to believe that I had ever had communion with such as those."

"Even though the knowledge were attended with your prolonged existence?"

"What good is my life to me? She does not love me. No, Bulwer! let me die! My death will make her happy; my life can only make myself miserable."

"Still here, Mr. Bulwer?" interposes the soft voice of Agatha, as she comes creeping up to the head of sofa. "This is good of you. But I am afraid dear Valence must be tired. Don't you think he would be better in bed? It is past two o'clock."

"I do not intend to go to bed to-night, Agatha; I shall remain here."

"To what end, Valence?"

"To speak to Isola. She promised me she would visit me to-night."

"She will not come whilst Mr. Bulwer is with you, as you well know. Had we not better go back to the ballroom, and leave you alone?"

"Perhaps you had. And yet I should have liked Bulwer to see Isola. He is so incredulous."

"He can see her another time. You must ask her permission first, remember. Come, Mr. Bulwer."

"Is he fit to be left by himself?"

"He has his bell, and Johnson is within call. He will go to sleep as soon as we are gone," she adds in a whisper.

"Why cannot Bulwer stay?" inquires the earl as they rise to leave the apartment.

"I thought you wished to see Isola. You know how timid she is with strangers."

"Yet she came before Everil!"

"She did not like it, as she told you afterwards. But perhaps you would rather have your friend!"

"No, no! He can return to me afterwards. Leave me for a couple of hours to myself, Bulwer, and then come back to me if you choose."

"I will not fail to do so, my dear fellow," says the young man as he and Mrs. West step into the hall together. Under the hall lamp he grasps her wrist, and looks steadfastly into her face.

"Mrs. West! do you believe in 'Isola'?"

Agatha's eyes move uneasily from beneath his gaze.

"Of course I do. I have seen her. So has Everil."

"You believe her to be a spirit, and not a woman?"

"A woman! O Mr. Bulwer, what absurd nonsense, when she can come through a keyhole or a pane of glass. Of course she is not a woman!"

"Well! I should like to see her do it," is his rejoinder as he drops her arm and follows her into the ballroom. A waltz is in active progress. It is some time before he can distinguish Everil. When he finds her she is seated languidly upon a couch with Staunton hanging over her.

"Will you take another turn?" Captain Staunton is saying as he comes up to them.

"No! thank you. I am tired. But I wish you would ask one of the O'Connor girls. You have not danced with either of them this evening, and it looks so particular."

"To hear your wishes is to obey them," he replies gallantly, as he moves away in quest of Miss O'Connor. Then the countess turns eagerly to Bulwer.

"How is he?"

"Very low, and quite convinced that he is sinking. But it will be all right, Lady Valence. I have ascertained that."

"Heaven grant it! If it is only right for him, I care little what becomes of me."

"It will be right for both of you."

"Do you think so? I know his high sense of honor, and am not so sanguine. You are sure you understand everything?"

"Perfectly."

"The hour we start, the place we go to?"

"Every particular."

"And you will not fail me?"

"As there is a God in heaven! No!" replies the young man, in a low voice.

"Where is Agatha?"

"She entered the ballroom with me just now."

"Then she has disappeared again," replies the countess, as her eyes wander round the apartment. "What makes her so fidgety to-night, I wonder?"

The remark sets Bulwer wondering also. What can make Mrs. West so fidgety to-night? Why should she have appeared so anxious that he should not remain in the library, and prevent the advent of the spirit Isola? If she is true to her brother-in-law, would she not hail any justifiable means by which his mind might be diverted from the subject of his approaching doom?

The more he ponders the more curious he becomes. At last he grows fidgety himself, and leaves the ballroom also. On the threshold he encounters Dr. Newall.

"Have you seen the earl lately, doctor?"

"I have just come from him. His pulse grows lower every hour. This is a melancholy contrast, Mr. Bulwer—feasting and dancing in one room, and death in the other."

"You believe it is death?"

"I believe it will be, unless a miracle occurs to prevent it. Lady Valence has terribly disappointed me."

"Do not judge her too harshly. Her anxiety itself may urge her to appear gayer than she feels."

"A lame excuse, Mr. Bulwer, and you know it. But thank heaven the poor fellow sleeps at present and forgets all his sorrow."

"Valence is asleep?"

"Yes; he dozed off as I was talking to him. He is so weak, he might well sleep his life away. But his valet is within call."

"Mrs. West is with him, I suppose?"

"No; for the moment he is alone, and I should wish him to remain so. I distrust that woman more than ever."

"So do I," is the earnest answer, as Bulwer slips through the crowd assembled in

the doorway, and makes his way up to his own bedroom. A thought has struck him—he is resolved to put it into execution. Quietly as a mouse he changes his dancing shoes for a pair of velvet slippers, and, with a dark rug in his hand, steals down the back staircase to the lower story. Only a few servants hanging about the corridors, to see what they can of the unusual festivities, encounter him upon his way, and he gains the library threshold unmolested. The room in which the personal attendant of Lord Valence waits in case of being wanted, although close by, is entirely divided from the larger apartment, and the door at the further end of the library, which is always kept locked, is covered by a heavy velvet curtain.

As John Bulwer enters he cannot hear a sound, or hardly see an object. The breathing of the earl is too faint and weak to be audible, and the solitary lamp which burns upon the table has been turned down to its lowest point. He gropes his way cautiously to the head of the large old-fashioned sofa on which his friend lies, and crouching down behind it, covers himself with the travelling rug, and prepares to wait for what may happen. He has determined that he will see and judge of the reality of this mysterious "Isola" for himself, and if possible penetrate what reason she can have had for foretelling evil to a man who (if the prophecy prove true) would have found it quite soon enough for himself. He has to wait there in his uncomfortable cramped position much longer than he anticipated or than is pleasant to himself. He hears the strains of the brass band, which has been sent for all the way from D—, strike up again and again, and the clocks strike *one*; and a noise of much rustling, and treading, and talking, as the company troop in to supper; and he is beginning to think he has come on a wild-goose chase, when he sees the velvet portiere that conceals the second door, which he has always been given to understand is locked, if not fastened up, move suddenly, as though pulled by a hand round which a pale light plays, and then close up again. At the same moment Valence, as if instinctively, stirs in his sleep, and then rousing, sits up on the sofa and looks about him.

"Isola!" he utters in a voice half of entreaty, half of awe.

A quick whisper comes from behind the curtain.

"The light—the light—it hurts me!"

The earl rises languidly, and totally extinguishes the lamp, then throws himself back upon his cushions with a groan, as if that slight effort had even been too much for him. The flame from the fire is now the only light in the apartment, and it plays upon his pallid countenance and haggard features as though he were a corpse.

Bulwer ventures to uncover himself, and look eagerly towards the curtain.

In a minute or so the drapery is again agitated, and for the space of an instant a form, clad in white, appears, and disappears again.

"There is no light now, and I am alone," murmurs Valence. "Come to me, Isola! I am too weak to rise and go to you."

The hangings are again parted, the form steps into the space before them, and the mysterious "Isola" is at last revealed to Bulwer's view.

The young man feels his heart beat quicker and the blood surge to his head. He has been told, on unquestionable authority, that he stands face to face with a spirit risen from the dead; and whilst the idea is still new to him, even the most lion-hearted man would experience a slight quail on such an introduction. Still trepidation does not deprive him of his senses as it did Everil. He trembles, but he can observe, and his observation is rewarded. The form that stands before him is worth looking at.

Slight and small in figure, and draped in some white, soft, cloudy material, that hangs loosely about every part, and yet seems to envelop all, "Isola" is the embodiment of what a fanciful imagination might conjure up as the appearance of a visitant from the other world. Her golden hair ripples loosely to her knees; her features are not so distinct as Bulwer would wish to have them, because her head and shoulders seem to be covered with a veil that looks like black crepe; but her bare arms are deadly white and bloodless-looking; and in one hand she bears a small antique lamp, the dimly-burning wick of which just shows sufficient light upon her person to render it mysteriously unrecognizable except as a whole. But Valence seems to have no difficulty in recognizing his visitor.

"True to the last!" he murmurs. "My faithful Isola, your task will soon be over, and your weary charge set free. But why do you look so mournfully to-night? What is the meaning of that dark veil about your head?"

"I come to earth," replies the apparition, speaking in a low hissing whisper, which renders it impossible to note the quality of her voice, "and I adopt her customs. She will mourn, whilst we rejoice."

"Will you stay with me to the end?"

"I cannot stay. My services are needed elsewhere. But as your spirit leaves the body it will encounter mine."

"And then I shall be free from all trouble, and sorrow, and disappointment forever! Isola, is the time certain? Is there no possibility of its being altered?"

"The fiat has gone forth—there is no possibility of change."

"And you will be glad to receive me, will you not? You will be ready to welcome me to those spheres where I shall again encounter my beloved father and brother? O, tell me, Isola, that *some one* will rejoice! That, though I leave none to regret me upon earth, I shall find the affection my soul longs for *there!*"

"It waits for you," is the low reply, "and you will realize it *to-morrow—at noon*. Farewell!"

"Stay, Isola—stay one moment! For the last two years you have been preparing my mind for the event so near at hand; but during all that time you have never let me touch you, nor even approach you nearer than I am now. Other spirits have handled me, written through me, and spoken to me. You only, of all my spiritual friends, have denied me this privilege. Why is it so?"

"I am not formed like other spirits. They are, except for a hand or a voice, for the most part intangible. My immortal part is clothed upon with an emanation from your own substance, and you could not approach too near or handle me without injuring yourself."

"What signifies an injury to a man with one foot in the grave? By this time to-morrow I too shall be intangible. But let me touch you to-night. I am still mortal, and this desire is strong on me."

"It must not be," says Isola, as she commences to back towards the velvet portiere.

"Then come nearer to me. I would not willingly offend you; but how can I tell that in the spirit world you will appear to me as you do now? Let me have a proof before I go that you are all you have said yourself to be."

"A proof! and at this hour!"

"Yes! I want it. The wish has come on me suddenly, but strongly. Pass over my sofa, Isola—walk through me—or float out of the window. Do something to show me that you are beyond my finite comprehension."

Bulwer is watching the apparition closely. He, too, is waiting anxiously to see the upshot of his friend's request.

"To-morrow—at noon!" is all the spirit answers, as she begins to glide away.

"You will not do it for me, Isola!" exclaims the earl, hotly. "You will even let me die, wrapped round with this mysterious, wavering credulity, which says one moment that 'it is,' and the next 'it cannot be.'"

"The proofs are coming—coming—coming!—to-morrow—at noon," whispers the fast-receding phantom.

"By heavens! I will have them now," exclaims Lord Valence, as he starts from his couch and advances towards the white-draped figure. In a moment it has vanished behind the heavy curtain, and he is left standing in the middle of the room alone.

Bulwer feels that his opportunity has arrived. With the speed of lightning he leaves his hiding-place, and gains the outside of the library door before the earl has staggered back to his seat.

The company are returning from the supper-table, and the corridor is filled with guests. Bulwer gives himself no time for thought or ceremony, but rushing past them in his slippered feet, gains the upper corridor, the further end of which he knows is the only communication (except that which leads to the kitchen offices) with the passage upon which opens the velvet-curtained door in the earl's library.

He reaches it breathless—but in time. Just as he turns into it, the apparition noiselessly appears at the other end, and seems about to make for the upper story. He rushes heedlessly to meet it. It sees him—pauses—and then turning, flees swiftly down the staircase by which it has ascended.

Bulwer, regardless of all consequences, pursues and overtakes it on the threshold of the locked door of the library.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"YOU WILL KNOW, HUSBAND, THAT I HAVE LOVED YOU."

THE ball is still at its height, though the first gray streaks of dawn have commenced to peer through the unshuttered windows of the castle, when John Bulwer persuades the earl to lie down upon his bed.

"It will rest you to take off your clothes, Valence, even if you do not feel inclined to sleep."

"Just as you like, dear Bulwer. It makes no difference to me. The object for which I waited here is accomplished."

He leans as heavily on his friend's arm, as they toll up the staircase together, as though he were about to sink through the ground.

"This is the last time I shall need to bear all my weight on you, Bulwer. I shall soon be able to walk by myself. What o'clock is it? How light the corridor appears!"

"It is just two."

"So late! and they are not yet tired of dancing! Some one is leaning against the door of my room. It must be one of the servants fallen asleep through fatigue."

But it is not one of the servants. It is Lady Valence. At the sight of her, even under such painful circumstances as these, his pale face flushes and looks glad.

"Everil! can it be you? What is the matter? Are you ill?"

She starts and is silent, trembling too much for speech, as Bulwer can well perceive, as she stands before them, gray and ashen in the uncertain light. He slips his arm from beneath that of his friend, and passes from them into an adjoining room.

"Ill! of course not! What on earth should make me ill?"

"But you are shaking. You must be terribly cold, standing in this draughty passage, and with nothing on your neck and shoulders. O, take care of yourself, Everil, for"—"for my sake," he is about to say, but he alters the expression—"for the sake of all who love you!"

"They are not many," she laughs carelessly.

"They ought to be! But why have you left the ballroom?"

"I was tired. I wanted rest. I thought you were in bed long ago."

"No. I cannot rest! But I shall soon!—I shall soon! Will you come and see me, Everil, before I go?" he continues, gently, as he lays his hand upon her arm.

"Before you go—where?"

"Where God pleases! Before I am called to leave you, I should have said. It will not be many hours longer now. You have not forgotten this is the third of February."

She seizes his hand passionately. A wan hungry look has come into her eyes. She is about, apparently, to cast herself upon his neck and strain him to her bosom—when she stops, and laughs derisively.

"How can you talk such nonsense! The third of fiddlesticks! Valence! I have no patience with you!"

"I do not ask it of you now," he returns, slowly; "only give it to my memory to-morrow, with pardon for all the trouble I have unwittingly brought upon your head. Believe me, Everil, that when I married you, I did not know—*what I know now*—or I should have exercised a spirit of greater generosity and forbearance towards you. The past cannot be undone; but in the future, remember that my last prayer was for your happiness and prosperity!"

He walks slowly from her as he speaks, and passes into the room beyond, where Bulwer is waiting to receive him. As the door closes upon her, Lady Valence sinks prostrate on the floor, and moans in the extremity of her pain.

"O, why did I not adopt the other course at once, and kill myself by inches? My death might have aroused him as effectually as the thought of my dishonor, and been less painful to look back upon. How kind he is! How patient—noble—generous! And he believes I can desert him! He believes that all my protestations of affection were so many falsehoods, concocted perhaps for the very purpose of covering my love for Staunton! How shall I ever undeceive him?—how ever convince him that I have but been acting a part in order to save his precious life?"

"Perhaps never! Perhaps all his life long he will consider that I have betrayed him! But if I may but live to see him live, I shall have my reward. And some day—

when all the mistakes of this world are set right—you will know, Valence—husband—dearest!—that I have loved you!"

She rises to a kneeling position, and presses her lips against the panels of the door that separates them; then hastily dries her streaming eyes, and passes into the open corridor again.

At its extremity she encounters Captain Staunton. He is in a hurry, and seems to have been seeking her.

"Not changed your dress yet, Everil! Do make haste! Everything is ready, and your guests are beginning to leave. This is just the time for us to slip away unnoticed."

"I will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

"Your absence may be observed before then, and it is no use anticipating a scandal. How red your eyes are! Have you been crying?"

"A little. It is an important step I am about to take."

"But I cannot have you weep over it, or I shall think you are an unwilling captive. Come! let me kiss those tears away."

But she shrinks from his embrace, as though it had been that of her bitterest enemy.

"Do not touch me! Some one may be watching us! I will go and tell my maid to get ready, and we will join you in the west corridor in less than half an hour," she answered.

"Your maid! You surely do not intend to take her with you, Everil?"

"Indeed I do. I never travel anywhere without her."

"But under these circumstances—"

"I should imagine it will make little difference who sees us fly or not. Will not all the world know it before noon?"

"You must do as you choose, but I consider it quite unnecessary. In twenty minutes then, let us say, in the west corridor. I will be sure to meet you there."

He turns away as he finishes his sentence; and Lady Valence walks slowly to her own apartment, where the maid, dressed in a dark bonnet, and shawl, and veil, is waiting for her.

"O, you are ready! Have you got out my things?"

"Which do you mean to wear?"

"The oldest, darkest, shabbiest apparel I may happen to possess, as is fit for the

darkest and shabbiest deed I have ever committed."

"Don't lose heart now that it is so nearly over," observes the maid.

The tone of her voice is so familiar that it is surprising Lady Valence does not resent it; but, on the contrary, she does not even appear to notice the change.

Perhaps she is smitten with a self-consciousness that the insult is not undeserved; perhaps she is unwilling to alienate the only creature who countenances the offence she contemplates.

No further conversation passes between them as the waiting-woman disencumbers her mistress of her balldress and jewelry, and, robing her in a simple black silk, throws a furred cloak about her shoulders. Only when the last preparations are completed, and they are ready to steal down stairs, hand-in-hand, like two guilty creatures bent on the same deed of infamy, Everil turns suddenly to her companion, and says:

"After all, you had better not go with me. Why should I compromise you, in order to assist my own ends?"

"I am determined to go with you, so it is no use saying anything more about it. Do you not see that my presence is necessary to your success?"

"But suppose my efforts end in defeat, and I drag you down with me?"

"There is no probability of that; but if there were, I am ready to risk it."

"O, thank you so much for saying so! You are the only creature I know that would do as much for me." And Lady

Valence actually stoops down and salutes her maid upon the forehead. Then, after a few tears and kisses, they leave the apartment softly and reach the western corridor unnoticed.

Maurice Staunton comes forward to receive them.

"I suppose your maid knows all, Everil?"

"All."

"And she is trustworthy?"

"I shall not give her the opportunity of being otherwise. She will travel inside the carriage with ourselves."

"Deuced inconvenient!" mutters the captain.

"I wish it to be so," is the dignified reply; and he considers that the discomfort will be but temporary, and makes no further objection to it.

A few minutes later, a dark travelling-carriage with post-horses—not unlike many that have conveyed their loads of papas and mammas and pretty daughters to the castle that evening—rolls over the draw-bridge and through the park gates, without exciting much suspicion in the mind of any one.

And no one discovers that Lady Valence has left her home until the last guest has departed, and Agatha West, desirous of ascertaining if the hostess's early retirement is due to sudden illness, enters her sleeping apartment—now at some distance from that of the earl—finds a note upon her toilet-table to tell her of the disgrace which has fallen on the house of Valence.

[CONCLUDED IN NEXT NUMBER.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

[CONCLUDED.]

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"IT SHALL CARRY ME THROUGH TO THE
END."

As Mrs. West reads the fatal document her face undergoes all manner of changes. She is not prepared for this. She is not aware what effect it may have upon her brother-in-law.

"So cruel of Everil," she thinks, "and so foolish! To compromise her reputation unnecessarily, and to give poor Valence a shock that may kill him—that will *certainly* kill him," she continues, mentally. "And yet I ought to tell him of it. He is the principal person concerned, and he would never forgive me if I kept him in ignorance a moment longer than was necessary. In his weak state, too. I shouldn't wonder if he died on the spot. He has borne her coldness, he might have borne her death, but his own dishonor—*never!* The Valences are the proudest of the proud. They would sooner kill their wives with their own hands than see them disgraced. He certainly must hear of it—and that at once—or some one may anticipate me with the news."

She flies to the earl's room as she finishes, and knocks loudly at the door. It is opened by John Bulwer. At the sight of him the widow's face falls.

"What on earth is the matter? Your brother-in-law is asleep."

"Let me in at once! I must see him! I have the most dreadful piece of news for him. Everil has eloped with Captain Staunton!"

"You cannot communicate the intelligence to him in that abrupt manner," cries Bulwer, attempting to restrain her from entering the dressing-room. "Think of what you are about, Mrs. West! you may kill Valence with the shock."

"It is right he should know it at once. He would never forgive me if I kept it from him. Valence! I wish to speak to you."

"What do you want with me?" inquires the earl, feebly, as he rouses from his uneasy slumber.

"A fearful disgrace has fallen on us. It

is shocking—abominable! I hardly know how to break it to you, but your wife has run away with that villain Maurice Staunton."

"*What?*" exclaims Valence, with an oath.

"Everil has left you, Valence. She has eloped with her old lover. I have just found this note upon her toilet-table to inform us of the fact."

"Read it, Bulwer," he says, in an unnaturally calm voice, when contrasted with his first exclamation.

Bulwer takes the paper from the widow's hand.

"*Tell Valence, Agatha, that I have left him. You will not receive this probably till noon, and by that time I shall be in D—. Tell him he is well quit of me. It is unnecessary for me to say more.*

"EVERIL."

"O my dear brother!" cries Mrs. West, as she prostrates herself before the earl, "don't let this terrible shock have any effect on your precious health. She is not worth grieving after. She has been deceiving you from the beginning. Try and forget her, Valence, and think only of the prospect before you. Hold him up, Mr. Bulwer. Give me that salts bottle. Let me fetch some cold water. He will faint. He will die! O, this is downright murder! A curse will rest on her to her life's end."

But Lord Valence puts the officious hands away from him almost roughly.

"When did they leave the castle?" he demands of Bulwer. His voice is not loud nor trembling, but very quiet, very cold, and very decided.

"Hours and hours ago," replies Agatha.

"That is impossible, Mrs. West; for when the earl came up to his room Lady Valence was standing in the corridor in her balldress."

"The hateful, deceitful, wicked creature!" says Agatha, weeping.

"You have not been here more than two hours, Valence. It is only just four o'clock. If they have been an hour on the road it is more than is probable."

"Go and inquire for me, Bulwer. Find out all the particulars you can, and come back quickly!"

He is sitting now upon the couch on which he has been sleeping, but he makes no attempt to move or throw off his dressing-gown.

"Lie down again, dear Valence," says Mrs. West, coaxingly, as soon as Bulwer has departed. "It is cruel you should be agitated thus, and just at this time, too! You feel faint, I am sure. Let me unloose your cravat."

"Leave me alone!" replies the earl, in the same hard unnatural voice. "I am not faint. I need no assistance. Leave me alone!"

Then he adds more gently:

"This is a sorrow in which no one can intermeddle, Agatha. It is a disgrace that must be averted, at all costs."

"But how can it be?" she exclaims, in surprise.

"Valence!" says Bulwer, reappearing, "they cannot have left the castle more than an hour, at the very outside. I have made the most searching inquiries, and find that a strange travelling-carriage with post-horses, that arrived here about ten o'clock last night, was seen to drive through the lodge gates again at about three this morning, although no one at the castle saw it take up its freight. Lady Valence's absence seems perfectly unknown to all but us three. Let us make a pact to keep it secret for the present."

"To what avail?" says Agatha, who would like to proclaim the fact from the housetop.

"Post-horses!" murmurs the earl: "I'll lay a wager mine would outstrip them. Order the new pair of bays to be put to at once, Bulwer."

"I have ordered them, Valence. They will be ready in ten minutes."

"To what purpose?" again demands Mrs. West.

"Where is Johnson?" cries Lord Valence, leaping from his couch. "Tell him particular business calls me to D—— to-night, and he must come at once and dress me."

"O, what is all this for, dear brother?"

"I will follow them and prevent this d——d villainy, if I die for it!"

"Follow them! and in your condition! It is impossible! It is madness! You will

perish on the road. Mr. Bulwer, exert your influence, exercise your friendship, and prevent the earl from running so terrible a risk."

"No one shall prevent me," exclaims Lord Valence, to whose pale face a bright scarlet flush has risen. "I have few enough hours left me on earth, and I will spend them as I choose. My darling in the clutches of that villain!—my wife—than whom I believed no woman to be more pure—contaminated by his touch, his love, his villanous companionship! No! I know that I am weak—helpless—dying—but I have strength enough and life enough to follow and rescue Everil before she is lost forever, and so help me God, I will do it!"

He is hurrying on his outdoor apparel now, and moving about the room at such a rate that Bulwer, remembering his late condition, becomes really alarmed.

"Everything shall be arranged as you wish it, Valence, but pray be careful. Your health is very delicate, and by these violent efforts you may frustrate the object you have in view."

"You mean I shall die before I overtake her. No, Bulwer, not unless it takes till noon to reach D——. I may die at her feet! I may find her—still pure and undefiled—and pray her with my dying breath to guard the name she bears a little longer for my sake. But not before—not before! An unnatural strength has risen up within me in the last few minutes, and it shall carry me through to the end."

"This is suicide!" cries Mrs. West. "I shall go in search of Dr. Newall. He may be able to persuade you not to kill yourself."

"Stay where you are, Agatha. It is my command this story goes no further. I forbid you even to call my valet. Bulwer is doing all that is necessary for me, and the fewer tongues there are to wag the better."

"But you will let me go with you, Valence, surely?"

He is about to object, when Bulwer interferes.

"Yes, Valence. Let your sister-in-law come too. She may be of use to us. I have a purpose in making the request," he adds, in a lower key.

"Very good. Then, Agatha, you may accompany us. My darling may—who knows?—consent to return with me, and need the assistance of a woman. And you have always been good to her and me.

Forgive me, Agatha, if I have spoken harshly to you, but I am sorely agitated."

"We are all ready now," observes Bulwer, as Mrs. West—evidently very uneasy in her mind—rejoins them, dressed for travelling.

"Give me my watch," cries Valence. "What is the time?—twenty minutes past four! Who would have thought it was only twenty minutes since Agatha brought me this fatal news?"

In reality it is more like an hour; but Bulwer has quietly put back the hands of the watch, and intends to repeat the operation whenever he has another opportunity.

"There is nothing more to wait for," says Valence. "Let us start at once."

His companions look at him in silent amazement. In his intense excitement all trace of illness has left him. He walks upright and firmly, and his voice has assumed a tone of command. His thin face is flushed and feverish; his eyes shine. He has all the appearance of a man bent on some great enterprise. Only when he finds himself shut up in the carriage, and journeying, notwithstanding the fleetness of the new bays, far less speedily than he desires, does he for a while lose the false strength lent him by excitement.

"That she should have deceived me!" he says; "she whom I worshipped as everything that was purest and best of her kind! O Bulwer, I have borne the misery of the change in her behaviour—I have borne her coldness and indifference—I could have borne even open unkindness and contempt; but *I cannot bear her dishonor!*"

"Hush, Valence! That is just what we are going to prevent. I'll lay you any odds we reach D— long before they do, and that you meet Lady Valence face to face before she has taken off her bonnet."

"But how are we to tell *where* to find them?"

"There are not so many hotels in D—that we need be long at a loss; but, as it happens, I have discovered, through the agency of"—here Bulwer, not being prepared for the contingency, halts for an idea—"of a note, in fact, which her ladyship must have dropped accidentally—I am half afraid, though, I left it behind me—that their destination is the Duke's Head Hotel."

"The d—d scoundrel!" mutters Valence.

"He appears to have secured rooms there, of course in his own name. If we

present ourselves boldly, and demand admittance to them, we are sure to be taken for the right party. That is one reason I wished Mrs. West to accompany us. We shall be ready, therefore, to greet the fugitives on their arrival."

"Ready to shoot him down like a dog directly he enters the room," replies Valence, laying his hand upon the case of pistols he had insisted on bringing with him.

"No, Valence, no! You must promise to restrain yourself, or you will force me to throw that case out of the window."

"I shall promise nothing! I feel as if the bare sight of his false face will be sufficient to make me thirst for his blood!"

To all this Mrs. West replies nothing. She, who has ever taken the foremost position in everything connected with her brother-in-law, now offers neither to second nor combat his opinions, but sits silent and shivering by his side, and with a very strong consciousness upon her that her day of triumph is coming to an end.

She seems terribly afraid of, and nervous in the presence of Bulwer, whose keen eyes seek her face whenever she appears likely to make a remark, until she subsides completely into herself, and the conversation, such as it is, is carried on between the men alone.

The town of D—is situated some sixty miles from Castle Valence. At the first stage at which they call for post-horses they find the other carriage (as is but natural) must be some miles ahead of them; the second, it has not left behind it more than twenty minutes, and before they gain the fourth, they have passed it at a hand-gallop—Lord Valence promising the postilions an extra sovereign for every mile they gain.

The race now becomes exciting. At the last stage they take Staunton's preengaged post-horses, and are well on their road to D— before he arrives to swear at the ostlers for not being ready with the change. Altogether, they do the sixty miles in about seven hours, and drive, steaming, up to the door of the Duke's Head Hotel at twelve o'clock; although Lord Valence's watch, by reason of his friend Bulwer's unceasing anxiety to consult the time on the evidence of his own senses, only points to ten.

"Can it have stopped?" says the unsuspecting earl, as he places his watch to his ear. "No, it is going—and yet only ten

"It seems almost incredible we should have done it in that time."

"Never mind the time," replies Bulwer, who is very much afraid Valence may think of comparing his repeater with the hotel clocks. "The main thing is, we are here before them. And now brace up all your nerves, my dear friend, for the meeting is not far off. They cannot be many miles on the road behind us."

"Supposing they are not coming to this hotel, after all?"

"I will ascertain that at once," says Bulwer, as he walks boldly into the vestibule of the Duke's Head, and demands if rooms have not been ordered there in the name of Captain Staunton.

"Captain Staunton, sir? Yea sir," replies the waiter, with alacrity, as he prepares to precede them up stairs. "This way, if you please, sir."

He ushers them into a handsome sitting-room, in the grate of which a fire is burning, and these preparations are evidently made for some expected arrival.

"And now send the landlord to me," says Bulwer, authoritatively, "at once—do you hear? We must make a confidant of the landlord," he continues, in explanation, to Valence, "or there will be a fuss about the rooms when they arrive."

"But why prevent it? What do I want more than to meet the villain face to face?"

"Valence, I have a notion that your wife is not what you think her to be."

"God bless you for saying so!"

"And I want you to promise me not to disclose your presence to them rashly, but to be patient, and hear first on what terms they appear to be together."

"Do you think I could stand by and listen to my own dishonor?"

"No! When you hear that, our compact is over. But you see this screen: all I ask of you is that, on their entrance, you will conceal yourself and us behind it until you see how the land lies."

"Your request is a very strange one, Bulwer!"

"I know it is; but I love you, Valence, and I make it with a view to your happiness. Will you trust me?"

"I consent so far, that I will do as you wish, if you will promise on your part not to put any constraint upon my actions."

"I promise. And now I will go and speak to the landlord. Without mentioning

names, or compromising any one, I can easily make him understand that it is for the reputation of his hotel he should fall in with your wishes on the subject. But will you not eat anything, Valence?"

"Eat! How could I eat while I am in this state of miserable suspense? O that they would but come!—that I could feel that that hound was settled with forever!"

He strides restlessly up and down the apartment as he speaks, looking as well and as strong as possible.

"I leave the earl with you for a minute, Mrs. West," says Bulwer, significantly. "*Be careful of him!*"

He regards her steadfastly as he says the words, and Agatha reddens, coughs uneasily, and turns her face away to the window.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HER PARDON IS COMPLETED.

"THEY are coming up stairs—they have just arrived!" cries John Bulwer, eagerly, as he hurries back into the hotel sitting-room. "Get behind the screen, Valence—be quick, Mrs. West! They must have taken on four horses at the last stage to be here so soon after us. And now—not a word, I beseech you, till you ascertain how it is between them."

They have but just ensconced themselves when the door is flung open, and there is a sound as of several feet entering the apartment.

"Why isn't breakfast ready for us?" exclaims Staunton, loudly.

"We waited to hear what you would wish served, sir. It can be got ready in a moment."

"What will you have, Everil?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You must be hungry after so long a drive. Where's the bill of fare, waiter?"

"Here it is, sir."

"Ah!—chops—steaks—salmi—fricassee—fish—omelet. Which shall it be?"

"I have already told you I wish for nothing."

"Hang it all! we must have some breakfast. Well, give us anything, waiter—everything—send up just what you choose."

"Very good, sir. It shall be all ready in half an hour."

"And send the chambermaid to show the lady to her room."

"Do no such thing. I am not going to any room."

"You will want to take off your travelling things."

"I intend to remain here," answers Lady Valence, as she removes her bonnet and throws it on a chair.

"At all events, let the maid go."

"No! I desire she remains with me."

The waiter, seeing all is not right, bows and leaves the room.

"Everil, what is the meaning of this?" says Captain Staunton, as he comes up to her side. "What unaccountable change has come over you?"

"A desire to have my own way."

"But I insist on your maid leaving us. I am not going to sit down to breakfast with a servant."

"I shall not ask you to do so. Alice, oblige me by throwing up your veil."

The supposed lady's-maid does as she is desired, and reveals the features of Miss Mildmay.

"What farce is this?" cries Maurice Staunton, staggering backward with astonishment. "What do you mean by bringing a third person to witness our flight?"

"I brought her as a protection against yourself."

"You are trifling with me, or you do not know the meaning of your words."

"Excuse me—it is you who do not understand; but I will try and make things plain to you. Maurice Staunton, I have had my revenge! In leaving Castle Valence with you I have but carried out a project by which we shall be separated forevermore."

"This, then, is the solution of your cursed coldness all the way to D—! You have been playing for revenge, madam, have you, and not for love?"

"For both; revenge on you, and love for one whom to name in the same breath is to dishonor. How shall I tell you all my motive so that you may understand it? You remember how I married Valence?"

"I remember—without a spark of love for him, and all your heart—such as it was—fixed upon me."

"Ay, 'such as it was'—you may well say that. But when I learned to love him, Staunton—my noble generous husband—it was with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength."

"To prove which, you bolt from him with me."

"To save him—because there seemed no other way. I married him, apparently a dying man, as you took pains to let me know beforehand; and when I learned to value him, my first question was, if it were possible to save him. It appeared hopeless. He had permitted his study of the supernatural to have so fatal an effect on him that his brain—so the doctors told me—had become diseased, and incapable of exciting itself to reason."

"The fool!" mutters Staunton.

Her fury is sublime in its magnitude.

"Don't you *presume* to speak to me by such a term of him! You, who are not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoe. When you found your way into the castle, and presumed to address me in your former tones, a design crept into my mind—whether hell or heaven-born time alone can tell. I had just been told that the only chance for my beloved Valence's restoration was to work upon his feelings. I knew that he was jealous of you. I resolved to give him that chance of life, even if I died for it myself."

"In short, you have made me the tool by which your husband is to be restored to health, madam?"

"I hope so—I think so."

"But you forget, at the same time, that you must lose your reputation. Who will be revenged now?"

"Not you, Captain Staunton—not you. You have never had a kiss to boast of, nor a line which you can produce against me; and as for this hurried journey, have I not had my friend Alice Mildmay to bear me company as well? Not that I expect ever to be restored to my former position. If all the world believed me innocent, and he thought I had been guilty of one look against his honor, I know that Valence would never receive me as his wife again."

Here Everil stops, and holds her hand against her beating heart; and Alice Mildmay creeps up to her side and whispers comfort to her, whilst Staunton sneers to himself apart.

"But if he lives, I can bear even that. If the dread of losing me by so terrible a means has had the effect which I have hoped and prayed for, and serves to rouse him to the consciousness that his physical weakness is a delusion of his own senses, I shall have repaid him in some measure for the love and patience he has displayed to—

wards me, and be willing to bear my just share of the punishment which accompanies even the appearance of evil."

All this time Bulwer has had the greatest difficulty in restraining Valence from rushing out upon Maurice Staunton and engaging in a hand-to-hand combat with him, which must have resulted in the most disastrous effects to himself. But his friend constrains him by look and touch to listen for a little longer, although his eyes are starting from his head with excitement.

"And pray how do you expect this potent spell to work?" demands Staunton, sarcastically.

"I do not know—I cannot tell; but Mr. Bulwer is working with me, and I have trusted all to him. Valence will follow me—I am sure he will—and very soon he ought to be here. O, how shall I meet him! How shall I tell him why I have acted as I have done?"

"You should have thought of that before, madam."

"I am here, dear Everil," whispers Alice. "I will speak to the earl for you."

"No; he shall hear it from no lips but mine; and then, if he can forgive—if he can forgive—" she repeats in a broken voice, as she throws herself sobbing upon Alice's breast.

"This is a pleasant surprise you have prepared for me, I must say; and not a particularly honorable one," remarks Staunton.

"Honor! What question of honor can there be between you and me?" she interrupts, scornfully.

"Call it by what name you will, madam, it is conduct I am not disposed to put up with. I did not take the trouble to come to D— this morning to be confronted by your husband and a fire-eater like Mr. Bulwer; therefore, as you will so soon be in their good hands, I shall take the liberty of wishing you good-morning."

"Not so fast!" cries Lord Valence, as he rushes from behind the screen and seizes Maurice Staunton by the throat—"not till you have given me a reckoning of this day's work, you d—d dishonorable villain!"

His eyes are flaming fury, his hand grasps a pistol. His adversary feels that, notwithstanding his weakness, with right on his side, he is not a man to be trifled with.

"You would not kill me where I stand!" he utters in alarm.

"I would shoot you like a dog, were not

death at the hands of an honorable man too good for such a cur as you! Speak! what answer have you to make me for your villany towards my wife?"

"You must have heard Lady—"

"Don't presume to mention her name with your dastardly lips, or I will cram this pistol down your throat. Yes, I have heard all! I have heard the motive she had for this imprudent step. But what was yours?"

"Mr. Bulwer," pleads Maurice Staunton, "are you going to stand by and see me murdered?"

"I wish I might! But I'm afraid there's no chance of it. Horsewhip the scoundrel, Valence, and let him go. You defile your hands by holding him."

"Out of my sight, then?" exclaims the earl, as, opening the door, he strikes Staunton across the mouth and throws him into the passage. "Out of my presence, and never dare enter it again, or you may rouse me to give you a worse punishment than this."

He slams the door in the face of the crest-fallen Staunton, and, throwing himself upon a chair, wipes the perspiration from his face.

"I believe it has done me good," he remarks, with one of his quaint rare smiles, as he looks up with glowing eyes into the face of Bulwer. He glances towards his wife, and she comes gliding to his feet.

"Not there, my love," he says, tenderly, "not there. Your place has never been—shall never be, one hair's breadth lower than my heart."

"O Valence! is it possible that you forgive me?"

"Can I afford to say No!" he answers, with his head bowed down on hers, "when I have so few more words to utter. Bulwer! what time is it?"

"It is one o'clock, my lord."

The earl leaps from his chair.

"One o'clock! Impossible! It was only ten when we arrived here!"

"It was past eleven, Valence. Your watch must have gone wrong."

"One o'clock! It cannot be! One o'clock! What day is this, then, Bulwer?"

"The third of February."

"The third of February, and one o'clock! Why am I here? What extraordinary mystery is this?"

"A mystery which I can explain, Valence. No, Mrs. West, I will listen to no pleadings on your part. To expose you is a duty which I owe to my friends."

"What is it you have been doing, Agatha?"

"Let me relieve Mrs. West of the pain of being her own accuser, Valence. You are astonished to find that the prophecy on which you built such faith has proved fallible. You will cease to be surprised when I tell you that it was invented and foretold by mortal lips."

"Isola a mortal! Impossible!"

"It is not impossible! *for here is Isola*," says Bulwer, as he leads forward the trembling Agatha, who throws herself at the earl's feet. "I was concealed in your library last night, Valence, when the so-called apparition appeared to you. I followed and came up with it, and found beneath a golden wig and cloudy draperies, and most artfully-disguised features, your sister-in-law, Mrs. Arthur West."

"And you have done this, Agatha," says the earl, reproachfully. "You, who have shared my studies and my house for so many years past, have made me a fool and a laughing-stock to my own household! And to what end?"

"The end is not difficult to define," says Everil, scornfully. "No, Agatha, don't touch me, for Heaven's sake! You and I can never cross hands in friendship again. Whilst I have been trying to save my husband's life you have been doing your utmost to destroy it. Leave me alone! Do not appeal to me! I look on you as my worst enemy."

"It was all for Arthur's sake!" wails the cat, betraying herself at last.

"For Arthur's sake! And that you might give your child a title, you would have robbed me of my life! Go, Agatha! there is no more despicable creature in this world to me than you. We can never live under the same roof again."

"And am I and my poor child, to leave Castle Valence?"

"Do you think I would let you remain there?" commences Everil, indignantly, but the earl places his hand upon her mouth and finishes the sentence himself.

"Certainly, and forever. You have your own portion. It must suffice you."

"I never thought to receive such treatment at your hands," she says weeping, as she prepares to leave him.

"Perhaps not! Nor I from yours."

"Mr. Bulwer! I shall never forgive you!"

"That will not affect my appetite, Mrs. West."

"And as for Everil—I only wish—I wish

—I wish—" but the widow's wishes are lost in the closing of the door.

"Follow her, Bulwer," says the earl. "Tell her I give her one week to clear out of Castle Valence. By that time I shall require my home again."

"Where shall you remain meanwhile—here?"

"I do not know. I do not care, so long as it is with *her*," says Valence, as he looks fondly down upon the golden head that is pillowed on his breast. Bulwer glances towards Alice. She takes the hint, and slipping her hand in his, they leave the room to speak to Mrs. West together.

Then Valence's lips bend down to meet Everil's, and the wife knows her pardon is completed.

"I feel as though I had just awakened from a dream," he murmurs, presently. "To find myself *here—to-day—at this hour!*—and with you, my beloved one, in my arms! To know that *you* are true, that '*Isola*' is false! Am I awake, dear Everil, or am I dreaming?"

"You have awakened, Valence, thank God! from the saddest dream your life has ever known. And now that you are convinced that our senses *may* mislead us where we permit them to be taken captive, and see the mischief which may accrue from unauthorized curiosity, may I hope, love—as I pray—that you have done with spirits forevermore?"

"With study of the science, and personal communication with them, Everil—yes. I swear it by my love for yourself, and all the devotion you have shown to me. But whilst you and I exist, dear wife—which is forever—we can never 'have done' with spiritual companionship. It is beneath us, over us, and round about us; appointed by the wisdom of the Almighty to be our protection and our guide; and we should fare but badly were these ministering spirits to forsake us. That by his fatherly goodness—can never happen; but for the future you and I will be content to feel and know his care without striving to penetrate the mysteries he has hidden from us. He has given me an angel in yourself, Everil—an angel to lead me on, to all good and happiness; and whilst I am clothed upon with mortal flesh, your spirit is the only one with whom I shall hold intercourse."

And the vow he registers upon her upturned lips, he will keep to their life's end.